An Official Journal of Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samitee, India

THOUGHT & ACTION

Committed to Build Rationalist Society

Issue 4 Vol. 9

Jan-Mar 2010

In this issue....

2. **B Premanand**
Suman Oak

5. **The Inquisition of Galilio**
Justice R. A, Jahagirdar (Retd)

10. **Invading the Secualar Space**
Ram Puniyani

12. **Decency of an Atheist**
Manu Joseph

14. **Dalits in industry**
Chandra Bhanu Prasad

16. **Should 7 yr old Sambhavi be in School or Temple?**
Babu Gogineni

20. **A few Thoughts on Ayurvedic Mubmo-Jumbo**
Dr. Stephan Barrett

26. **Objections to Faith**

27. **Superstitious Gangsters**
Ritesh Shah

28. **Human Psyche**
Dr. Khalid Sohail

30. **Hindu Mathematics - How Original was It**
Pervez Hoodbhoy

34. **Soul as Given in Scriptures**
Dr. R. P. Tongaokar

Founder
Dr. Narendra Dabholkar

Editorial board:
PK Nanawaty
TB Khilare
Ms Suman oak

Correspondence:
email: pkn.ans@gmail.com

B. Premanand
(17 Feb 1930 - 4 Oct 2009)

Suman Oak

The Life of a Skeptic, Rationalist, Humanist, Atheist and a Brave Patriot Comes to an End.
It is a custom to eulogize a person after his or her death and shower all kinds of epithets on him which at many times are not pertinent. But all the above epithets are factual statements in case of this great man who left behind him innumerable disciples, followers, co-workers, colleagues, friends and admirers to mourn his death. And the wonderful thing about all this mourning crowd is that they are all rationalists, people who think for themselves. They did not waste any time in organizing mourning ceremonies for this man of action, but went about their usual routine after learning that he is no more; as he expected them to do; he had told, 'don't ever give up some activity to see my body.'

This brave patriot participated in the Independence Movement at a juvenile age of 12 years. Although not incarcerated by the British, the timid principal of his school, in order to remain in the good books of the rulers, expelled this brave lad from his school. Thus his formal education, brought to an end, did not interfere with his real education any more. He was educated at home by a private tutor. His patriotism was that of an innocent child and not for gaining any political clout. It waned after this stint in patriotic movement of early 1940s, only to become a wider catholic goal reaching beyond the boundaries of a single nation. Perhaps because he escaped from being shaped by formal education, his life took a different turn altogether.

Search for truth-the human instinct to know- took hold of him. Being the son of a theosophist, he got interested in yoga and other occult sciences and left home 'In Search of God' to follow Swami Ramdas who toured India without any money. Premanand too could tour without any money in his pocket because many selfless people helped and he was grateful to them. Premanand gives credit for this to human beings and not to god as did the Swami. In his search for God and spirituality, Premanand visited many a Sanyasin and Guru throughout India. But he refused to follow any of them blindly. He discovered that Swami Shivanand who extolled the healing benefits of 'raising of the Kundalini' to no end, himself suffered from diabetes and other chronic ailments. But the Swami gave a lame excuse that 'he wanted to endure and not cure them as those diseases were due to his past sins.' He also found out the truth about Swami Narayananand, the Guru of the famous Yoga Guru, B.K.S. Iyenger. This Swami produced the sacred letter 'Aum' on a blank paper by touching it with a burning piece of wood. He also wrote a few books on celibacy couching his non-sense in scientific words. Premanand once found him in a sexually compromising position with the landlady of the building. Premanand, the born skeptic, could not be fooled like other gullible disciples including BKS Iyenger.

His experience with many other Sanyasins and Yogis made him wiser; he was convinced that 'the Yoga and other Tantric Knowledge imparted by these self-deluding godmen had no scientific basis whatsoever'. Without spending more time in search of god and miracles, the Hindu boy who was out to obtain magic powers like Yogis, now took a different path, in search of truth behind the so called magical powers and miracles. There are four different ways, he explains, of performing a miracle- sleight of hand, use of chemical compounds, use of mechanical means and making use of some little known facts about human body and the way it functions. Premanand explored all the miracles he came across and found out the tricks

of the miracle mongers. He wrote copiously on them, performed them himself and trained innumerable workers in performing and then explaining the scientific facts that make the miracle possible. His desire, he says, is to build a research centre in India where all the miracles and psychic phenomena will be exhibited and explained with a library on religion, magic, science, etc. But sadly, he can not conjure up money that is needed for all this, from thin air.

In 1969 Dr. Abraham Kovoor, the great Sri Lankan Skeptic and Atheist came to India. His "*Miracle exposure*" lectures proved a turning point in the life of many youngsters involved in social reform activity. The movement for eradicating superstition is one of its outcome. Now 'debunking spiritual tricksters' became Premanand's mission. He, like others involved in the movement of eradicating superstitions, took up the task of exposing the so called miracles and the miracle mongers that exploited gullible people. But unlike the other movements, he became practically a one-man crusade against the greatest of the trickster-exploiter Satya Saibaba. This Baba, as is well-known, has influential followers among all walks of life. Recently the newly elected Chief Minister of Maharashtra, postponed the business of taking oath and forming his ministry and went to Pune to pay his obeisance to this Baba who had come there. Premanand has suffered a lot in exposing the misdeeds of and fighting law suits against Satya Saibaba risking his own life as well as the life of his family members. The episode of the Writ Petition under Indian Gold Control act and the infamous murder of six young disciples in Saibaba's Ashram on 6 June 1993 are well-known. Premanand published the Monthly *'Skeptic'* and a number of books exposing this fraudulent trade through his *'Skeptic Book Club'*.

Premanand and other like minded activists have kept up Dr. Kovoor's movement and his famous challenge of offering *One Lakh Rupees* to anyone who could demonstrate psychic abilities under fraud proof conditions, even after his death in 1978. This amount has been increased to ten lakhs by the Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti but there had been no takers so far. Premanand was convinced that to clear people's minds of superstitions and blind faith he has to nurture their brains that were atrophied, for generations by religious indoctrination and belief in god. He had to train them in rational thinking and expressing their minds with courage.

For nearly three decades the Rationalist Premanand visited thousands of villages and towns in India exposing godmen and their tricks and conducting science workshops to spread critical thinking. He has visited 49 foreign countries. Acknowledging his mission he was given a fellowship by national council for Science and Technology Communication by the Government of India.

Premanand disapproved those rationalist activists who started well and then joined some leftist political movement or promote things like naturopathy, yoga, etc., and dilute the rationalist movement. While he was on his death bed some religionists spread a rumour that he has now started believing in god and supernatural powers. He was quite drowsy and was not able to respond to any queries. But when he was told about the rumour, he opened his eyes indicating that he was steadfast in his convictions even at that moment. To declare this to the public he signed a *'Deathbed Testimonial'* and also put his thumb impression to it (since his hands were too week to produce a clear signature) in presence of the doctors who attended on him, Shri Narendra Nayak and others.

This death bed testimonial made on 20th Sept. 2009 is a proof of his commitment to atheism and rationalism the convictions with which he lived his whole life.

Despite being an atheist to the core Premanand did not deny the right of faith and worship to any human being who is so inclined. He did not tell people not to believe for, he thought, it was for them to decide whether to believe or not. Swami Manavatavadi of *"Kids' Kingdom Un-Orphanage"* praises Premanand as the only Indian Humanist who wanted to have prolonged discussion with him. When Swami was described by some one as a religious spy, Premanand retorted, 'rationalism is not a gang of criminals to fear being spied. Only criminals are afraid of spies.' Premanand accepted Swami's institution as a member of FIRA and held its National Executive Committee meeting along with a *National Seminar on Scientific Thinking, Rationalism and Tolerance* arranged by the *International School of Humanitarian Thoughts and Practice* in Kurukshetra on May 5, 2002. Swami Manavatavadi praises Premanand for his 'clean, clear, brave, non-partial, non-prejudiced, non-casteist, non-lingo fanatic, open and democratic' attitude towards all. A truly rare spirit!

Premanand had more than his share of personal grief. He thinks he had been a failure with both of his children. Kabir was murdered and Sumedha died of a heart attack. But his greatest personal failure, he thinks, is that he could not change his own people; may be because of lack of time with them. He is unhappy that whatever changes he could bring about occurred too slowly. He was happy with his school at Thikkody. Here about 50 children of various castes and religion were being taught in an atmosphere where superstitions had no chance to spoil the thinking of these youngsters. But sadly enough, this egalitarian school was shut down by the Kerala Government just in three years time.

In Nov. 2006 he was diagnosed with cancer and underwent surgery. Just a couple of weeks after it he attended the rationalist meeting when *Banglore Vicharvadi Sangha* was founded and the 6th conference of FIRA (of which he is the founder) organized by the *Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti*, in Pune. The Samiti presented him with an award for his contribution to rationalist movement in India. Despite his failing health, he completed and opened to public his long cherished project -a Permanent Exhibition on the method of science- at Pedannur. Plenty of awards and accolades came his way. He founded many an association and institution. Despite all this fame and honour and despite being born in Brahmin family with huge landed property in Kerala, Premanand remained a humble penniless activist.

For Premanand, being a rationalist or a free thinker was not enough; it was more important to help others also to know enough of the realities of life to be able to reject gods and godmen and thereby create a humanistic and rationalist world for all to share. For that, he wanted that activists go to younger people and not waste their time on the older generation.

If Premanand had ten more years of active life he would like to record about 1500 or so miracles (so far he has been able to record only 150.) Also his science exhibition that is made up of posters only, he would like to develop into a laboratory with working models for hands on experience for children.

His message to us all is, *'All spiritualism is a mere delusion and only Science and Scientific attitude towards life can save people .'*

■

The Inquisition of Galileo

Justice R.A. Jahagirdar (Retd)

Four hundred years in the history of mankind is too small a period to make any progress, but the last 400 years have seen more progress than could have happened in four thousand years. For nearly 1500 years the world, even the world of science, lived with the idea that the earth was the centre of the universe and the sun revolved around the earth. After all it was the God-ordained geocentric world. The planet moved around the earth in circles. The Aris to Teliam world was in circles. The circle was a perfect manner in which things moved. Everything to be perfect must be in circles. The egg was not perfect because it was not circular. But things otherwise were perfect. The sun moved around the earth as circles. "Genesis" tells us that God created the universe and God could not have created anything less than perfect. What is more perfect than a circle? This was the basis of Aristotelian logic.

The planets, which were the creation of a perfect God, moved in circles around the earth. Man was after all the creature of God who wanted him to be in the centre of the world. Man was an inhabitant of the earth and, therefore, the earth had to be in the centre of the universe and around it moved the planets. That is how the geocentric world was visualized. Circle, round, was the basis of everything that was perfect. That was Aristotle's logic which was perfect deduction of the time. Evidence was not collected; it was assumed. Given this major premise, minor premise was provided and the conclusion was inevitable. Aristotelian logic ruled science as it was then understood. It suited the Church which was happy with that sort of logic because the earth was presumed to be round and at the centre of the universe. No one dared to challenge this view.

It was even Ptolemy, the Egyptian who was one of the earliest sky watchers, who insisted that the earth was round and the centre of universe, consistent with the Aristotelian view. This despite that the planets moved in a peculiar manner and could not render to a reasonable calculation. It was still the insistence on the deductive methods. Search for knowledge outside one's mind was not even thought of. All knowledge, according to this method, was confined to one's mind and the logical method dictated by the religious scriptures. For nearly four hundred years, this method dominated the world of knowledge as a result of which practically no progress was made in knowledge. May be the conclusions drawn were logically correct. Knowledge was the result of internal cogitation. It gave rise to mysticism or metaphysics but not the substance of knowledge. Thinkers rejoiced in their ability at hair-splitting. Did it add to the stock of human knowledge?

For the first time, it was Roger Bacon (1213-1292 A.D.), an English Franciscan, who canvassed the view that experimentation – not just revelation or the classical wisdom of Thomas Aquinas – is a path to truth. It is not known whether he possessed the gadgets ascribed to him. For his heretical views he was put in prison for fourteen years. The clock was put back.

It was another Bacon who gave a thrust to the progress of knowledge. Frances Bacon, who had been earlier impeached for corruption, devoted the latter period of life for explaining the steps necessary for the advancement of learning. Will Durant has put it, "Science now began to liberate itself from the placenta of its mother philosophy. It shrugged Aristotle from its back, turned its face from metaphysics to Nature, developed its own distinctive methods and looked to improve the life of man on the earth."

Francis Bacon's major contribution of inductive logic – the process from the specific to the general – be used for academic and scientific discovery, an approach embraced by modern science. Once this approach was accepted, there were inquiries, there were investigations, observations were resorted to, experiments were conducted – what one can call positivism was adopted – these are the things which made science possible and progress after nearly 1400 years the world had followed the deductive method of deduction.

In astronomy, data never changes. Stars and planets have been in the same position since at least known history of mankind. Even from the time of Ptolemy of Egypt, earth had a stationary place. The sun went round the earth. For a true astronomer with an active mind this gave several difficulties.

A Polish bishop, though believed in God, through observation and calculations, came to the conclusion that the sun was stationary and the earth and other planets moved round the sun which was not a planet but a star. He was Nicolas Copernicus.

It was thought otherwise in those days. One Mr. Jean Bodin, a sixteenth century religious priest, said:

"No one in his senses will ever think that the earth, heavy and unwieldy from its own weight and mass, staggers up and down around its own centre and that of the sun."

Copernicus was in his senses. His studies of the sky and ancient texts forced him to finally reject the then existing theory. His theory overthrew the fifteen hundred old theory of Ptolomic system and opened the crater of true astronomy. Arthur Koestler who has made a deep study of astronomy and has written a book on the subject has called Copernicus "a conservative cleric who started the revolution against his will." This is the Copernicus revolution which changed the movement of sun, earth and other planets.

Before I comment on Galileo's contribution, I must mention some of the contributions Galileo made to other branches of knowledge. Galileo, no doubt, upheld Copernicus' theory. He spread it, in one sense popularized it. The Church was not amused. Apart from the Inquisition to which Galileo was subjected, the book in which Copernicus has propounded his theory was put in the Index. "Index" is a list of books which the Catholics were forbidden to read. "Lady Chatterley's Lover" had been put in the Index.

Librorum Prohibitorum was the name when it was enacted by the Church. It was drawn up in 1557 and from time to time revised. Now the list is abolished.

Galileo was actually a physicist. He was born on 18th February, 1564 in which year Shakespeare was also born. Clear signs of science could be seen in his knowledge and behaviour. His ambition was originally to become an artist. Michelangelo died when Galileo was born. However, his father in Florence who was reasonably a rich man, sent him to University to study medicine. But physics attracted him like a magnet. He made his scientific discovery – that the swings of pendulum, regardless of width, take equal times. He also found that lengthening or shortening the arm of a pendulum he could retard or quicken his pulse. By adjustment of the length of the arm of pendulum it could make the movement of the pendulum to synchronize with his pulse. This 'pulsigola' he could measure even the heart beats. A pupil of Galileo, Torricello, constructed the first barometer in 1643.

In the period in which Galileo lived, his name was great. Governments valued his knowledge. In military matter he was regularly consulted. He could give the distance of a ship in the sea. His famous experiment in the tower of Pisa is doubted, but much talked about. He threw two spears of unequal weight from the top of the tower of Pisa and demonstrated that when two objects of unequal weight are dropped from a height, they reach the ground at the same time. This was contrary to the prevalent belief; it was also contrary to imagination.

Galileo was not the one who invented telescope, but the principle and use of a telescope were his. Lenses were invented in Holland. Astronomers used lenses to magnify. Galileo found that when a concave lens is used with a convex on top, magnification is multiplied. With the help of such a telescope he would study the movements and confirm the findings of Copernicus. Copernicus revolution was, according to Galileo, confirmed. He also spotted four moons of Jupiter. They are called Io, Europa, Ganymede and Callisto. In astronomy they are called Galilean Satellites.

The discovery of four moons of Jupiter was a great blow to religion. God had created the universe. Neither in the Bible nor in any scripture a mention had been made of these planets. According to the people, all heavenly bodies must go round the earth. For the first time stellar objects were seen to go around another planet. This was another blow to Ptolomic theory.

Nebula then was nebulous. Consisting of stars, though, the stars did not show any features. Galileo showed that Nebula was a group when viewed through a telescope. It was because of the immense distance that the stars were nebulous to the naked eye.

In 1609, Galileo confirmed Copernicus revolution with the help of a telescope, thus attracting the wrath of the Catholics. However, as long as the Copernican proposition was viewed as a hypothesis, the Church did not deem it necessary to persecute Galileo. Galileo, however, could not be silenced. He wrote a slender book giving a story of three persons. Of them, one was a simpleton who acted as were asked by the then Pope. Galileo invited inquisition, but did not abandon the earth's revolution. He proclaimed that he was obliged to believe the same God who has endowed with sense, reason and intellect; has intended us to forgo their use. He said that philosophy (then natural philosophy):

"is written in this grand book of universe, which stands continually open to our gaze cannot be understood unless we first tried to comprehend the language and read the letters in which it is composed. It is written in the language of mathematics."

The ground is laid for Inquisition. After Martin Luther, the Church was uneasy with heresies which might weaken the Church. It was very important that heresies should be suppressed. The Bible was important and was regarded as the repository of all knowledge. How can a man upset divine knowledge, especially knowledge guarded by an Institution like Roman Catholic Church? To say anything contrary to what is said in the Bible is heresy and heresy must be suppressed. A belief or practice contrary to the orthodox doctrine of the Church is/ was heresy. An opinion contrary to what is accepted is heresy. How can there be two opinions on what the Church regards as its doctrine? It is clear from the Bible and from what has been officially followed that earth is the centre of the universe, that it was inhabited by man who was created in God's own image, that the sun and other planets orbit the earth.

Everything that followed from Copernicus was heresy which was held and supported by Galileo was heresy.

Originally, Inquisition started a procedure for inquiry. The attempt was to know the truth and possibility. Later it was realized that it was necessary to put down heresy. Inquisition became an institution. Holy office was established. It conducted Inquisition. Whether right or wrong, "heresy" had to be crushed. A heretic was made to confess to the contrary to what view he held. Sometimes, like Bruno, heretics were adamant, obstinate and strong. Weapons were added to Inquisition. Third degree methods made the heretics confess to their errors. Some refused to admit that they were wrong and were burnt at the stake.

Because of his pre-eminence in the society and also because of his knowledge, Galileo was never tortured; though the instruments of torture were shown to intimidate him. Galileo met many ecclesial persons who could influence. He moved to and fro from Florence to Rome. Once he had a long conversation with the Pope, but failed to convince the latter. The Pope, though refusing to lift the Inquisition which had been started in 1616, was sufficiently impressed by Galileo's learning to say "For a long time we have extended our fatherly love to this great man, whose fame shines in heaven and marches on earth".

A news Pope who was formerly a pupil of Galileo was appointed. The latter's hope soared but hopes were soon belied. The Inquisition continued.

It was the practice of the Inquisition to question the Accused intensely to bring upon him the pressure of the Church. Torture was not applied immediately. The Accused was allowed to think, to mediate for years. That is how the Inquisition in the case of Galileo, started in 1616, ended in 1622, with his retraction.

Actually the Inquisition started in 1632. One may recall the Inquisition as an institution was created by Pope Paul III in 1542 to stem the spread of Reformation doctrines. It was even given the power to Judge competing doctrines. So it could hold Copernicus wrong.

On 16th April, 1616 Galileo was brought into the room which is now the Post Office of Rome. Rules of procedure were simple, through they were not the rules of a Court. The questioning, in the case of Galileo, was soft and not threatening. The Court did not meet again; the trial ended there. On 22nd June, 1616, the Inquisition pronounced him guilty. But it offered him absolution on the condition of full abjuration; it sentenced him to the prison of the Holy Office for a period which the Holy Office was to decide. He was made to renounce the Copernicus Theory. A penance was also imposed upon him. That was that he would recite penitential Psalms to 3 years. On 22nd June, 1633, Galileo, then 70 years old, retracted and gave a long confession, part of which is as follows:-

" With a sincere heart and unfeigned faith, I abjure, curse, and detest the errors and heresies and generally every other error and heresy contrary to … … Holy Church and I swear that I will never more in future say or assert anything which may give rise to similar suspicion of me and that if I know any heretic or anyone suspected of heresy, I will denounce him to this Holy Office."

When he came out of the hall, he is reported to have said "Yet he does move". This is doubtful as there is no reference to it in his biography.

He spent three years in the prison of the Inquisition. Later he was moved to a couple of private houses. At last was allowed to stay in his own. He was alone and almost blind. He had an illegitimate daughter who was a nun and she took care of him. Technically he was still a prisoner. He was forbidden to travel outside the grounds of his own house. In 1638, John Milton, the famous English poet, came to see him.

On January 8, 1642, aged 78, he died. It was in 1835 the Church realized that he was right and withdrew his works from the Index. Will Durant says: "The broken and defeated man had triumphed over the most powerful institution in history."

■

Good Social System: A Need of the Hour

You can not have good social system when you find yourself low in the scale of political rights, nor can you be fit to exercise political rights and privileges unless your social system is based on reason and justice. You cannot have a good economic system when your social arrangements are imperfect. If your religious ideals are low and groveling you cannot succeed in social, economic and political spheres. This interdependence is not an accident but the law of our nature. Like the member of our body you cannot have strength in hands and feet if your internal organs are in disorder. What is applied to human body holds good of the collective humanity we call society or state.

Mahadev Govind Ranade

Religious Hallucinations

Where there is a strong will to believe argument is of no avail, but to anybody who really want to find out the truth, a study of hallucinations is indispensable. It will explain how grossly absurd statements came to be commonly believed by people who are to all appearances reasonable in other matters, but who will not listen to argument where religion is concerned. I know a religious gentleman, who is now dead, who resolutely refused to read rationalistic literature because he was afraid that it might possibly make him change his views. But people can of course decide for themselves whether they prefer religion or knowledge.

R D Karve
Reason, Oct 1932

Invading the Secular Space

Ram Puniyani

Satya Sai Baba of Puthaparthi in his recent tour of Mumbai (Nov. 2009) was invited by the Maharashtra Chief Minister designate, Ashok Chavan to his official residence, Varsha, for blessing the house and for the associated puja (invocation). When criticsed for inviting the Holy Guru to his official residence he said that since he is a devotee of the Baba from last many decades it is a privilege for him. There are many other news items where state functionaries mark their presence for the programs of Gurus and Babas (God men).

As far as Satya Sai Baba is concerned he is regarded as the living God by his devotees, while he himself claims to be the reincarnation of Sai Baba of Shirdi. This Sai Baba is also a miracle person and a spiritual Guru. His miracles have been exposed by the Rationalist Associations and his trick of producing Gold chain was brought up in the court, as production of gold is illegal. This case was not pursued for various reasons. There are many charges of sexual abuse by Sai baba. Magician of fame P.C. Sarkar also said his miracles have nothing to do with divinity but are mere magical tricks.

Use of official residence for such functions is in total violation of the secular constitution of the country where religion is a private matter of the individual and state functionaries can't wear their religion on their sleeves in official capacity and in official places. Contrary to that norm, lately this norm is known more for its violation than by adherence to it. Gone are the days of Nehru when he could stand up and snub such actions by whosoever it is in the official capacity. Of course, Gandhi, Father of the nation and Nehru the architect of Indian state were no devotees of any Baba or Guru. Over a period of time such principles have been violated with impunity. Uma Bharati during her brief tenure as the Chief Minister ship of Madhya Pradesh converted her official residence in to a Gaushala (Cow shed) with saffron robed Sadhus forming the main residents of her official residence.

India has quite a broad fare of God men. There are Gurus, Sants, Maharajs, Acharyas and Purohits (clergy) in the main. Their role has been changing over a period of time. Last three decades seem to be the time of their major glory, with their presence in all spheres in a very dominating way. Their number has also proliferated immensely and while some of these are big players, Sri Sri Ravishankar, Baba Ramdeo, Asaram Bapu to name the few. There are hundreds of them scattered in each state. Many of them are working in close tandem with Hindu right, Swami Assmanand, Late Swami Laxmananad Sarswati, Narendra Mahraj etc. These are the one's who have created their own niche with different techniques, while Shankarachayas, are associated with the Mutts coming from historical times, the Akshrdham chain is also not very old a tradition. The Pramukh swamis (Chief Guru) of these temples wield enormous clout. One recalls Anand Marg came up during the decade of seventies and not much is hearing of that now.

Overall religiosity has been on the upswing and not many are protesting the promotion of blind faith by many such God men. The rational thought and movement is on the back foot and political leadership, social leaders, of many hues are bending over backwards to please these Babas, some of whom are also dispensing health and some of them claim to be looking into the crystal ball of future.

There is an interesting correlation between the coming up of adverse effects of globalization, rise in the anxieties and deprivations and the current dominance of God men. Many an interesting observations about these God men are there, the major one being the rise in alienation in last three decades along with the rising religiosity in the social space. Many a remarkable studies on this phenomenon are coming forth. One such is by a US based Indian scholar of repute, Meera Nanda. In her book, The God Market, she makes very profound observations. She points out that this rising religiosity is manifested in boom in pilgrimages and newer rituals. Some old rituals are becoming more rooted and popular. She sees a nexus between state-temple-corporate complexes also. Secular institutions of Nehru era are being replaced by boosting demand and supply of God market.

A new Hindu religiosity is getting deeply rooted in everyday life, in public and private spheres. The distinction between private and public sphere is getting eroded as the case of Sai Baba in Maharashtra Chief Ministers official bungalow shows. Hindu rituals and symbols are becoming part of state functions; Hinduism de facto is becoming state religion. Hindu religiosity is becoming part of national pride with the aspiration of becoming a superpower. She observes a trend of increased religiosity. In India there are 2.5 million places of worship but only 1.5 million schools and barely 75000 hospitals. Half of 230 million tourist trips every year are for religious pilgrimage. Akshardham temple acquired 100 acres of land at throw away price. Sri Sri Ravishanker's Art of Living Ashram in Bangalooru has 99 acres of land leased from Karnataka Government. Gujarat Govt. gifted 85 acres of land to establish privately run rishikul in Porbander. Most significantly Nanda argues that the new culture of political Hinduism is triumphalist and intolerant, while asserting to be recognized as a tolerant religion. While claiming to have a higher tolerance, its intolerance is leading to violence against minorities.

It is because of this that even if the BJP may not be the ruling party, the political class and other sections of state apparatus have subtly accepted Hindu religiosity and the consequent politics as the official one, and so the justice for victims of religious violence eludes them. The question is, can the struggle for justice for weaker sections also incorporate a cultural-religious battle against the blind religiosity and proactive efforts initiated to promote rational thought.

■

The Bhagavad-Gita

It is expressly mentioned in the Gita that it is an attribute of Brahmins to believe in God, not of the other three classes. Apparently others can be atheists without any harm! At any rate, it is easy to see that it would pay them to become atheists rather than belong to a religion which deliberately gives them an inferior status. And the same may be said about women, who are also put down as inferior. Will women, Vaishyas and Shudras take a lesson? Only education can bring them to see through all this impositions.

R D Karve
Reason 1 Jan 1939

Decency of An Atheist

Manu Joseph

It is confusing to see a healer in a wheelchair, but the miracle man made the irony disappear. When Sai Baba visited Bombay this week, waiting to fall at his feet were some of the most powerful men in the country. It was a familiar world at his feet, where usually presidents, ministers, RBI governors, corporate chiefs and Supreme Court judges arrive. There is something frightening and melancholic about it—to know that your country, your life, in a way, is run by people who believe in the powers of a godman.

The endurance of Sai Baba as some form of a god is astonishing. He has been publicly accused of sexual abuse and his miracles would increasingly appear naïve today even to his devouts (PC Sorcar once claimed he was just a bad magician. Sorcar, famously, converted Sai Baba's sandesh-from-thin-air into rasagulla). Rationalists have for long tried to discredit Sai Baba. Once they even filed a case against him for producing gold chains from thin air. They said that if they were created through supernatural means, they devalued the precious metal by increasing its supply. But in the end, Sai Baba has triumphed. Faith, as always, has beaten reason.

Some people are repulsed by the sight of influential men falling at the feet of godmen. The sentiments of the believers in the paranormal are protected by law, but those who believe in reason cannot be guarded in this manner. They go through life, especially in this country, not with the chuckle of superior disdain as people imagine, but on some days with great rage. Days when they are reminded that men who run the country seek extraterrestrial help, that criminals donate kilograms of gold to temples to absolve themselves of their latest crime.

There is this unsung decency about atheists, as they are loosely called. They know there is no hot weather hell, there is no punitive rebirth as an earthworm, yet they never hope to benefit through evil. They do not create traffic jams, they do not create noise, their charity is never a pathetic transaction. In their moments of confusion, at the most they would say, 'I believe in a Force'. It is not a great line, but it is a pure line—they really do not expect the 'Force' to do them any favours, like increase their salary. They just go about their lives without harming anyone, even though they know nobody is watching. You may say this is too much generalisation, that most bad people are bad because they are godless. But that is the astonishing thing. From what I have seen, most criminals (and criminals who have given themselves fancier names) are great believers in God.

There is a spiritual movement among the urban affluent to understand life through a guru who is differently dressed but is not expected to do magic. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar has filled this slot through entrepreneurial brilliance.

A few years ago I interviewed him at a Malabar Hill house (of course). On the floor were seated Vinod Khanna, Nagma and others like them. On a throne was Sri Sri. I was supposed to interview him in front of his devotees, some of the most influential people of Bombay. There was a vacant chair facing Sri Sri. When I sat in it there were gasps. I was expected to sit on the floor (a journalist before me indeed had sat that way). But then I am such a boor.

I asked him questions like why he spent so much time with the rich (Vinod Khanna laughed in a good-natured way at the foolishness of a young reporter). Sri Sri would reply by saying my facts were wrong (and the gathering would laugh at me), or he would snub me by saying that

if only I smiled more often I would understand everything (and the gathering would laugh again). As I was leaving, he said something about me (which I could not get) and the crowd burst out laughing, this time louder.

I really do not know why these people were there on the floor, listening to someone who said something like, 'Don't fall in love. Rise in love…We are all one.' Surely, they have heard all this before they met him?

People who do not seek divine mediums, who know that 'scepticism' is merely a name given to higher intelligence, they do have their just rewards. They go through life with a clarity of mind which is like a clear, beautiful day.

It is also called joy.

■

Curse of Timidity

When we speak of social evils, we are in the habit of considering only physical and physiological ones, and more especially, alcoholism, syphilis, and tuberculosis. Evidently these are not by any means small evils and it is certainly to fight them courageously, and this is no easy task either, considering their prodigious development in present society, whose machinery becomes more complicated everyday.
In my opinion, however, there are also social evils of a moral nature, which though their manifestations are less violent, are at least as harmful as those I have mentioned above. I think one of the most important of these is the mental disease called timidity, which is pregnant with evil consequences for individuals as well as for groups. What evil does it not beget, with its deep and varied manifestations!

R D Karve
Reason, July 1934

Rationalists on Trial

All rationalists must guard against lapses into non-rational behaviour in their daily lives. They cannot, in the very nature of things, be members of this or that religious association, wear caste-mark or holy threads, observe fasts, go to temple festivals and so on. The writer is aware of the fact that in many cases, extern influences are so powerful, that it is impossible for all but the most exceptional to stick to their convictions and bring them into practice. But if there is any compulsion one must try one's best to resist it, or if resistance is impossible, submit only under protest. We must always remember that we are on trial. We are being observed with greater minuteness than other people.

R D Karve
Reason, Feb 1932

Dalits in Industry

Chandra Bhanu Prasad

The debate on affirmative action in the private sector has taken a bizarre turn, not only in terms of results but also in terms of attitude. Led by Ratan Tata, 21 leading Indian industrialists issued an 'emancipation proclamation' pronouncing the entire generation of dalit/tribal people with degrees from Indian institutions "unemployable". Triggered by a newfound 'conscience' they have decided to create a new generation of dalits/tribals through "skill upgradation". They will now give "credible" civil society organisations the task of refining dalit/tribal children, who will in the long run become "competitive" in the job market. Embroiled in the issue of this so-called skill upgradation and a few scholarships to dalit/tribal children, the private sector job debate has been given a sound burial, for the time being at least.

The private sector has reacted sharply since the initiation of a debate by the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government, a year ago, on whether affirmative action towards dalits/tribals needs to be extended to the private sector.

People and organisations are entitled to their own views; indeed this is an essential ingredient in any democracy. But industry could simply have rejected the government's move. Instead, it says it will not compromise on what it describes as 'merit'. The question one needs to ask here is whether any agency, government, private sector or sting operation has ever established the fact that dalits selected through reservation under-perform in the workplace. There are 58,000 dalit/tribal professionals working with public sector enterprises (PSEs) and public sector banks. According to a report by the National Commission for Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes (1989), there are 21,215 dalits/tribals in managerial/professional positions so senior that they are categorised as Group A, equivalent to the IAS/IPS. Most of these officers are either engineers or IT professionals; many are employed in organisations like BHEL, SAIL, NTPC, ONGC, IOC, MTNL, VSNL, HPCL and GAIL. Has any study been conducted by these organisations to show that dalit professionals under-perform? BHEL (Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd), for instance, is India's premier engineering goods company with customers spread over 60 countries. BHEL participates in global tenders and has won contracts away from European and American companies. It has been making a profit since 1971. BHEL's Haridwar unit, one of the oldest and most prestigious in the chain of companies, employs 1,200 engineers, amongst whom 189 are dalits/tribals. Has any study found these 189 engineers wanting in their performance?

Industry spokespersons have been saying that India would lose its competitive edge over global players if reservation were forced on the private sector. Does India have a competitive edge over global players? The truth is that the Indian economy is smaller than Mexico's, much smaller than that of Brazil. India has a less than 1% share of the world market. And India is not an IT superpower as its share in the world IT market is less than 3%. This despite the fact that for around a decade India's best talent has gone into IT education.

The truth is, Indian IT companies and professionals do not produce projects, they produce 'spare parts' for projects and help maintain them. We can be said to have 'IT mechanics'. We constitute a cheap labour market. Any individual with basic IT training, given the opportunity, can prove her/his worth irrespective of marks/grades obtained during graduation. How long will industry continue to hide this fact from the public?

Dalits, on the other hand, have been arguing that the private sector is one the biggest beneficiaries of dalit reservation in government jobs. As first and second-generation consumers they spend nearly all they earn. Dalits/tribals invest least in immovable property; their earnings flow directly into the market, so necessary for a market economy to succeed. On joining the private sector, dalits/tribals expand the consumer base and cause the private sector to flourish. The private sector, instead of examining dalits' claims that reservation/affirmative action helps industry grow, has instead been condemning dalit/tribal communities.

As I understand it there is a very strong practice of affirmative action in the United States. Most American corporations follow aggressive recruitment policies regarding racial/ethnic minorities. In fact, there is hardly any US corporation without a diversity/affirmative action department. As a result, African Americans now comprise 14.08% of the American private sector workforce, though their share of the population is only 13.0%. The famous American magazine *Black Enterprise* , in its February 2004 issue, profiles 75 most powerful African Americans in corporate America, of whom 18 are CEOs.

Most US corporations follow a mission statement that invariably contains a non-discrimination declaration. In fact, any American company with 50 or more workers submits an annual report to the federal government showing the racial/ethnic proportion of its workforce.

Needless to say, this non-discrimination clause is meant to protect racial/ethnic minorities in the United States. A company that has no or very few African American employees can be charged with practicing discrimination.
American corporations entering into business partnerships with foreign corporations mandate the same non-discrimination clause as one of the conditions. That means an Indian company entering into a business partnership with an American company must assure that it will be "non-discriminatory" in its employment practices. That means, in the Indian context, a company entering into a business partnership with an American corporation must do for dalits what American corporations do for African Americans.

Industry spokespersons and organisations have deployed all kinds of arguments in response to the government's initiative to create public consensus on the issue of private sector job reservation. They have used a variety of tricks to manipulate public opinion. The following statement best illustrates how low a respected industry body like the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) is prepared to stoop:

"Many US and European 500 companies that outsource their back office and research work to India provide contracts on the pre-condition that the vendors will be non-discriminatory in their recruitment...if reservations are forced, multinational clients could come under pressure from their shareholders to cancel off shoring contracts." -- CII, February 15, 2005

Author is a Dalit activist, writer and columnist

Should Seven Year old Sambhavi be in a School or in a Temple?

Babu Gogineni

For the last few weeks Humanists, Rationalists and Human Rights activists have been waging a huge battle against the forces of fundamentalism in Andhra Pradesh. This is a battle where all sections of society, and in which the media, the police, the justice system, aggressive fundamentalists, the Dalai Lama as well as the Humanists and Rationalists are involved. It is a battle that is being watched with keen interest by millions of homes as it unfolds on live TV and through public discussions, newspaper articles and also in homes.

How the fraud became public

Sambhavi, a child of 7, is claiming to be the reincarnation of a childhood friend of the Dalai Lama. She speaks with great clarity and precision. She claims Tibet will be free in 2010, that there would be a great event in 2012, and that the Dalai Lama would visit her soon in Surya Nandi temple in Kurnool District. It seems the child is in touch with the Buddhist leader by telepathy. Sambhavi is also saying that the Telugu Soothsayer of medieval times Veerabrahmendra Swamy's predictions will come true in 2012 and 2014. Her caretaker Usha Rani says she has miraculous powers.

It is nonsense, because rebirth implies we have a soul which can retain memories. No one has shown that the soul exists and we all know that the seat of memory is the brain which dies with the rest of the body. Claims of rebirth are culturally conditioned which is why we do not hear of them in Muslim or Christian or African societies. No claim of rebirth has been shown to be true in Hinduism or in Buddhism.

Our Questions

We asked who Sambhavi's real parents were as only Usha Rani who is parading as Sambhavi's caretaker seemed to be around. What were the economic interests behind this claim, we queried. And if the Dalai Lama was visiting Surya Nandi to inaugurate Buddha Vijayam - the ashram being built for Sambhavi - what are his interests? If it is true that he was coming, was he coming to nominate his successor? We also pointed out that the sooth sayer Veerabrahmendra Swamy's predictions were hardly what someone could take credibly – there is no authentic text, nothing has been predicted in a verifiable manner – there is only myth, legend, pulp fiction and popular cinema.

Thanks to all the media promotion, Telugu people soon knew everything about Sambhavi - a lovable child with charming mannerisms: daughter of Bengali brahmins living in Varanasi, she was made a sanyasin at the age of 4, and once when she went into a trance she travelled to the Himalayas where she met the Dalai Lama and also read Tibetan manuscripts. The child's caretaker Usha Rani claimed that Sambhavi expressed concern for the Dalai Lama's health and suggested that the Dalai Lama became healthy after Sambhavi prayed for him. We all now knew that Sambhavi held regular confidential telepathic discussions with the Dalai Lama with regards to the future of Tibet. We were told that she speaks 5 languages fluently, blesses whoever prostrates in front of her, and that the devotees were quickly benefitted emotionally and economically. Sambhavi came to Surya Nandi with a famous film singer's family and when she arrived here she miraculously started speaking Telugu, and chose to establish her ashram there!

What did Sambhavi Say?

But all the reports from the gushing journalists, the charming childish talk of Sambhavi and the halo of the Dalai Lama's support could not hide the real estate business being set up in and around Surya Nandi, the eagerness of Usha Rani to promote her ward's supernatural claims, or the incoherence of the child and the political nature of the statements being made through her. Here is a sample:

- India is doing well because India has Buddhism.
- China and Pakistan have bad people. They will be punished.
- Tibet will be free in 2016; China will become democratic in 2012.
- I was born for Tibet's freedom and I will do anything for Tibet's freedom.
- There is a giant statue of the Buddha in the soil in Tibet – it went inside the soil because otherwise China would take it away. It will emerge from the earth as a ray of light.
- The Dalai Lama was the Buddhist diety Balabadhra in the past life and I (Sambhavi) was the Buddhist goddess Ugra Taraka Devi.
- Lord Siva is in Tibet. Hanuman will go to Tibet, worship him, and he will free Tibet.
- All non-vegetarians will be destroyed when Veerabrahmendra Swami will reincarnate as Veerabhoga Vasantarayalu in Surya Nandi on 14 January 2012.
- Veerabhoga Vasantarayalu will also pull out the eyes and the hearts of non-believers (atheists).
- Jagan Mohan Reddy, son of late Rajasekhar Reddy will become the next Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh state.

How to Stop This?

The constant media hype and the frenzy that accompanied it, the announcement of the impending visit of the Dalai Lama and the daily challenge to our sanity were priming us up for action. Now there was also news that India's richest industrialist and one of the world's wealthiest individuals Anil Ambani donated Rs. 1 Crore (Rs. 10 million or USD 200,000) to Surya Nandi temple. The Dalai Lama, it was announced, would come on 21 Dec. to inaugurate Sambhavi's ashram.

There was now an urgency for action as things seemed to be rapidly getting out of hand. What if the Dalai Lama arrives as threatened on 21 Dec in Surya Nandi and declares that Sambhavi would be his successor? Even if he did not do that, what if he declares Buddha Vijayam as Sambhavi's ashram? If that was done, Sambhavi would never be able to have a normal childhood. This is how in Nepal Hindu maidens are made Kumaris, who are till puberty considered divine and after nearly a decade of isolation from the rest of society are thrown out of temples to fend for themselves.

So, I started putting together a strategy, working with colleagues and collaborators and in discussion with Prof. Narendra Nayak, President of Federation of Indian Rationalist Associations.

We had to do a number of things:

- Approach the AP State Human Rights Commission.
- Alert the National Commission for the Protection of Rights of Children.
- Invite the cooperation of fellow Humanists and progressives.

- Prepare the ground for international action, and consult with Roy Brown for raising the matter at the UN in Geneva once local remedies are tried out.
- Ascertain whether the Dalai Lama and Anil Ambani really supported Sambhavi.
- Make the Sambhavi matter a household issue for which the media needed to be involved.

20 Nov: Universal Child Rights Day

We then announced to the media that our day of public action would be 20 Nov '09 which marks 20 years of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and 50 years since the UN's Declaration on the Rights of the Child.

We submitted to the judge respectfully that

- This was not a religious debate, but a Human Rights struggle.
- Children who have been identified as the reincarnation of a dead person have always been psychologically damaged much before adulthood.
- Sambhavi has the right to a normal childhood, to be brought up in the loving care of a mother, and to play.
- It appears that the child has been indoctrinated for nearly 3 years and it had lost all touch with reality. Such mental abuse should attract the relevant civil and criminal provisions of the law.
- Not the religious views of the parents but the best interests of a child are paramount.

We urged the Judge to take action and directions:

- For the rehabilitation of Sambhavi into normal life with the help of child psychologists.
- To the State government to take immediate steps to halt the abuse.
- To summon Sambhavi's parents and Ms. Usha Rani and the relevant birth records of Sambhavi to ensure that she has not been a victim of abduction and exploitation.
- To issue notice to the Dalai Lama to ascertain if he or his organization has a role in this.
- To issue guidelines to the media so that they will report such matters with sensitivity.

We also submitted that we were offended that a crime of abuse of a child is being portrayed as a spiritual achievement, to the detriment of the child's best interests.
In response, recalling that when previously a child was being used for TV reality shows he had passed orders putting it in the protection of a Government Child Home, the Honorable Judge passed instant orders to the Collector of the Kurnool district to present a report on the parentage of Sambhavi as well as whether the Human Rights of Sambhavi are being violated. In view of the urgency, the Collector was given just 10 days to report – till 30 Nov 09.

The Hindu Right Wingers

TV9 was covering everything live, and their journalist excitedly announced that the situation was tense and that violence was expected between the two groups that were gathering there. Already a group belonging to the Student Federation of India who arrived with no prior information to us - but to support our petition - was arrested by the police and taken away. Members and leaders of the Hindu right wing VHP and RSS who had gathered there started shouting slogans against us, giving dire warnings to Rationalists for interfering with Hindu religious affairs. They picked up a fight with me. Some were drunk and all appeared

intoxicated with their religion. After some 10 minutes of live TV interview, the police advised us to leave since the VHP activists were becoming increasingly difficult and aggressive.

We filed the petition to save Sambhavi. She has shown no miracles and should not be called a goddess. She has to go to school and should not be exploited in the name of religion: India would progress as a nation if all went to school. In any case, Sambhavi is a Buddhist and so the Hindus need not get agitated unnecessarily by our action. Not only the Rationalists but also many religious and non religious people were morally offended by how the child was being abused. Their humanitarian instincts were waiting for a formal avenue to express themselves. Our petition and campaign was on all their behalf.

The official inquiry was conducted for 3 days in all. Despite the empty boasting of Usha Rani's lawyer and unclear threats of legal action, Sambhavi was finally produced in front of the inquiry. The press reports that Usha Rani was ordered out of the temple by the Endowments Department, and the local villagers also largely expressed their disbelief in Sambhavi's miraculous powers when the inquiry was taking place. We were confidentially passed on recordings of telephone threats made by Usha Rani to some journalists. Others have received threatening phone calls. We are keeping a record

Further Developments

The Collector's report notes that Usha Rani says she is 48 years old, that she completed her BA from Mysoora University, that she says she does not remember where the university is located nor the year when she passed the exams! He also noted that neither Eenadu, Andhra Jyothy, Vaartha, Saakshi and Praja Sakti Newspapers are gathering and publishing more evidence. Some have revealed that the Varanasi addresses given by them were fake; some traced and spoke to Usha Rani's aged parents who pleaded with the media that they were leading a respectable life and that they had no contact with their daughter for a number of years. While Usha Rani said to the Inquiry that her son lived in the US, some journalists claim that he lived, in fact, in Bangalore. The Collector ordered that a caretaker and a police constable be posted with Sambhavi pending clarity about the child's real parents. He prohibited Usha Rani and Soumya Acharya from taking Sambhavi from the area without government permission.

Some people ask us why we are interested in Sambhavi when there are millions of other children in India, all of them suffering They ask us if we will help all of them as well

We respond that every child has to be rescued child by child, and that they need not wait for us to help those they have identified: we suggest that this is a moral obligation that they too can share. That it is a national duty to help children in a country which is 139th in the comity of nations for living standards, and which shamefully has the world's biggest concentration of child labor. We also remind them that it is a national malady that when someone does something good the onlookers query why this good thing, and not another!

(*An abridged version of the article forwarded by the author through e-mail*)

■

A Few Thoughts on Ayurvedic Mumbo-Jumbo

Stephen Barrett, M.D.

Deepak Chopra claims that "by consciously using our awareness, we can influence the way we age biologically. . . . You can tell your body not to age." He has reportedly made millions of dollars marketing such messages along with books, lectures, tapes, and consumables based on a "modern" version of an ancient Indian healing system (ayurvedic medicine). Chopra promises "perfect health" to those who—through ayurvedic methods—can harness their consciousness as a healing force. Chopra claims that "remaining healthy is actually a conscious choice." He states:

If you have happy thoughts, then you make happy molecules. On the other hand, if you have sad thoughts, and angry thoughts, and hostile thoughts, then you make those molecules which may depress the immune system and make you more susceptible to disease.

The rear cover of his book *Perfect Health* states:

Once you have determined your body type from the detailed quiz inside . . . this book provides you with a personally tailored program of diet, stress reduction, exercises and daily routines. It's based on a 5,000-year-old system of mind/body medicine that has been revived today as Maharishi Ayurveda. Its a total plan for . . . using the power of quantum healing to transcend disease and aging—for achieving *Perfect Health.*

Chopra claims that herbs prescribed in ayurvedic treatment "take the intelligence of the universe and match it with the intelligence of our own body." His audiocassette program, "Magical Mind, Magical Body," is promised to help you "achieve a brilliantly blissful life." Time/Life Video has advertised his "audiovisual workshop" as "a must for anyone seeking perfect health." Called "Growing Younger Practical Guide to Lifelong Youth," it contains tapes and a guidebook containing "interactive exercises designed to help you personalize your anti-aging strategy to your body's individual needs."

The Nightingale-Conant Corporation is marketing Chopra's "Journey Into the Boundless," an audiotape set said to be "based on a life-changing seminar—that frees you to realize your full potential." The product brochure quotes Chopra as saying that, "Understanding your body's natural rhythms and needs activates unbelievably powerful disease-fighting processes within you." The product is also promised to tell: (1) how to eliminate fears and phobias from your life forever, (2) how to heal illnesses by stimulating the body's "inner pharmacy," (3) how to eliminate health problems simply by understanding your body type," and (4) the secret of people who eat whatever they want and never gain a pound."

On a "Donahue" show, Chopra maintained that people who are happy not only have fewer colds but are less likely to get heart disease or cancer. During one segment, Chopra took Phil Donahue's pulse and diagnosed him as "a romantic." The program also featured a testimonial by Marian Thompson, a patient whose metastatic breast cancer had gone into remission with chemotherapy plus ayurvedic treatment. Chopra asserted that his methods had played a major role in the woman's apparent recovery by strengthening her immune system. Ms. Thompson subsequently died of her disease.

Another of Chopra's books, *Ageless Body, Timeless Mind,* is reported to have sold over a million copies in hardcover, including 137,000 in a single day after an appearance on the Oprah Winfrey show. Chopra has also attracted considerable criticism. In 1994, *Forbes* magazine dubbed him "the latest in a line of gurus who have prospered by blending pop science, pop psychology, and pop Hinduism." A more recent report in *Esquire* described him as "a personable, charismatic man of handsome mien and beguiling voice who has mastered the rhetoric of enhancement." As far as I can tell, Chopra has neither published nor personally conducted any scientific studies testing whether the methods he promotes help people become healthier or live longer.

Chopra's book *Return of the Reishi* promotes the idea that meditators can levitate. Chapter 13 describes his personal experience with "lifting off," which he calles "the first threshold in yogic flying":

As the meditator begins to practice, he lays down a pattern of repetition in which the body more and more begins to understand what the mind wants. In scientific parlance this is called behavioral conditioning. In common language, he is simply acquiring a habit. Mundane as it sounds, flying is simply a habit. Over time, the body stops shaking and, unexpectedly, while doing nothing more than the same practice he has done in the past, the person accomplishes the result. His body lifts up and goes forward.

Needless to say, this is a remarkable moment for every meditator, and of the fifteen thousand TM meditators in America who practice the yogic flying technique, each one remembers his first liftoff with incredible vividness. My own experience is fairly typical. I was sitting on a foam rubber pad, using the technique as I had been taught, when suddenly my mind became blank for an instant, and when I opened my eyes, I was 4 feet ahead of where I had been before.

"Ancient Roots"

Proponents state that ayurvedic medicine originated in ancient time, but much of it was lost until reconstituted in the early 1980s by the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. Its origin is traced to four Sanskrit books called the *Vedas*-the oldest and most important scriptures of India, shaped sometime before 200 B.C.E. These books attributed most disease and bad luck to demons, devils, and the influence of stars and planets. Ayurveda's basic theory states that the body's functions are regulated by three "irreducible physiological principles" called *doshas*, whose Sanskrit names are *vata, pitta,* and *kapha*. Like astrologic "signs," these terms are used to designate body types as well as the traits that typify them.

Like astrologic writings, ayurvedic writings contain long lists of supposed physical and mental characteristics of each constitutional type. *Vata*, for example, is said to "govern all bodily functions concerning movement" and to accumulate during cold, dry, windy weather. According to Chopra's Time/Life Video guidebook: *vata* individuals are "usually lightly built with excellent agility" and "love excitement and change"; balanced *vata* produces mental clarity and alertness; and unbalanced vata can produce anxiety, weight loss, constipation, high blood pressure, arthritis, weakness and restlessness.

Ayurvedic proponents have claimed that the symptoms of disease are always related to the balance of the doshas, which can be determined by feeling the patient's wrist pulse or completing a questionnaire. Some proponents claim (incorrectly) that the pulse can be used to detect diabetes, cancer, musculoskeletal disease, asthma, and "imbalances at early stages when there may be no other clinical signs and when mild forms of intervention may

suffice." Balance is supposedly achieved through "pacifying" diets and a long list of procedures and products, many of which are said to be formulated for specific body types. Through various combinations of *vata, pitta,* and *kapha*, ten body types are possible. Somehow, however, one's *doshas* (and therefore one's body type) can vary from hour to hour, season to season, and questionnaire to questionnaire.

This ad appeared in March 1988 in *Vegetarian Times* magazine. It asked about my memory, the size of my teeth, the visibility of my veins, the rapidity of my speech, and about 50 other characteristics of my body, personality, and lifestyle. When I responded, I learned that my body type was "kapha-pitta." To achieve "balance" and thereby enhance my health, I was advised to follow a "pitta-pacifying diet" in the late spring and a "kapha-pacifying diet" in early spring. I was also advised to drink herbal teas, take *Maharishi Amrit Kalash*, investigate TM, and consult an ayurvedic physician for a more detailed evaluation.

Some proponents state that the Maharishi Vedic approach includes "knowledge of how the influence of the planets affects health, prosperity, and every area of life" and that "negative influences can be neutralized through the proper procedures."

Background History

The son of a New Delhi cardiologist, Chopra was born in 1947 and graduated from the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in 1968. After interning at a New Jersey hospital, he trained for several more years at the Lahey Clinic and the University of Virginia Hospital and became board-certified in internal medicine and endocrinology. Although he developed a thriving practice and became chief of staff at New England Memorial Hospital, he became increasingly uneasy about his situation.

Chopra's autobiography (*Return of the Rishi)* describes what impelled him toward ayurveda. One "pivotal" experience involved "pulse diagnosis" by Brihaspati Dev Triguna, "the preeminent living Ayurvedic physician," who, in 1981, told Chopra that his life was "moving too fast" and he was in danger of developing heart disease. Triguna advised Chopra to sit silently each morning, spend more time with his wife and children, chew his food slowly, make sure his bowels move at the same time every day, and eat skinned almonds slowly in the morning.

Another factor in Chopra's conversion was his experience with transcendental meditation (TM), which he credits for helping him stop "drinking black coffee by the hour and smoking at least a pack of cigarettes a day." TM is a technique in which the meditator sits with eyes closed and mentally repeats a Sanskrit word or sound (mantra) for 15 to 20 minutes, twice a day. TM is alleged to help people think more clearly, improve their memory, recover immediately from stressful situations, reverse their aging process, and enjoy life more fully. Proponents also claim that "stress is the basis of all illness" and that TM is the "most effective thing you can do to improve all aspects of health and to increase inner happiness and learning ability." Meditation may temporarily relieve stress—as would many types of relaxation techniques—but the rest of these claims have no scientific basis. Most diseases (including cancer) are not stress-related, and stress-reduction has no proven effect on the course of most illnesses.

In 1984, Chopra met the Maharishi, who encouraged him to learn about Ayurveda. Chopra did so and in 1985 became director of the Maharishi Ayurveda Health Center for Stress

Management in Lancaster, Massachusetts. He also founded and became president of the American Association for Ayurvedic Medicine and Maharishi Ayur-Veda Products International (MAPI). An FDA report states that Chopra remained MAPI's sole stockholder until September 1987, when the stock was transferred to the tax-exempt Maharishi Ayurveda Foundation. MAPI is now called Maharishi Ayur-Ved Products International.

In 1993, Chopra abandoned these ties and moved to San Diego, where he became executive director of the Sharp Institute for Human Potential and Mind/Body Medicine (part of a large mainstream medical organization) and opened a treatment facility called the Center for Mind/Body Medicine, which charged $1,125 to $3,200 for its week-long "purification" program. He also marketed seminars, books and herbal products through Quantum Publications, which was owned by him and his family. Most of the products were marketed under the brand name "Ageless Body, Timeless Mind."

Something for Everyone

MAPI has advertised in health-food magazines that in 1986 three ayurvedic physicians revived an ancient herbal formula called *Maharishi Amrit Kalash*. The ads stated that the formula "brought perfect health to the Vedic civilization thousands of years ago" and could "restore balance and order to the entire physiology by enlivening the connection between mind and body." Through its catalogs, MAPI has offered an expanding line of herbal formulas and teas, "designer foods," personal-care products, cough syrups, mineral supplements (with herbs), books, audiocassettes, and CDs, variously promised to "nourish," "cleanse," "balance," "protect," "energize," "vitalize," "invigorate," "enliven," "soothe," "strengthen," "correct," "stabilize," "improve," and/or "regulate" the mind, the body, or a body component.

Many other herbal preparations have been marketed through ayurvedic physicians who could purchase them at a 30% discount for resale to their patients. A catalog from the late 1980s refers to these products as "food supplements" but states which ones are useful ("as a dietary complement") for cancer, epilepsy, poliomyelitis, schizophrenia, tuberculosis, and more than 80 other ailments. Another publication, marked "confidential," lists "indications according to disease entities" for about seventy products identified by number. Practitioners could also select remedies with "Maharishi Ayurveda Treatment and Prevention Programs," a computer program copyrighted in 1987 by Maharishi Ayurveda Corporation of America, that generates reports for both the doctor and the patient. The data entered included disease codes and body types. Federal law requires that products marketed with therapeutic claims be generally recognized by experts as effective for their intended use. I do not believe that these products met federal approval criteria, which would mean that such marketing was illegal. The documents to which I refer were collected between 1987 and 1991. I don't know whether these distribution systems still exist or when they were set up.

Quantum Publications' 1995 catalog offered books, inspirational tapes, musical tapes (some for each dosha), skin-care products, massage oils, seasonings (for each dosha), and herbal formulas. The catalog stated:

Ancient Ayurvedic texts describe each herb as a packet of vibrations that specifically match a vibration in the quantum mechanical body. All bodily organs, for example, the liver, the stomach and the heart are built up from a specific sequence of vibrations at the quantum level. In the case of a malfunction, some disruption of the proper sequence in these vibrations is at fault. According to Ayurveda, a herb exists with this exact same sequence, and when applied, it can help restore the organ's functioning.

The formulas included *OptiEnergy* ("for energizing and balancing the physiology"), *OptiMind* (to aid mental activity), *OptiMan*, and *OptiWoman*. Several products named after organs or diseases were identified as "supplements . . . to be taken only when recommended by a health professional trained in Ayurveda." These included *OptiHep, OptiNeph, OptiCardio* and *OptiRheum*. In 1995, an "American Journal" producer had samples of nine products tested by two laboratories, which reported that all of them contained insect fragments.

In July 1995, Californian Jonie Flint filed suit against Chopra, Triguna, The Sharp Institute, and various other individuals and organizations. Flint's husband David, who was suffering from leukemia, had consulted Triguna in April 1993. According to the complaint, Triguna was represented as a licensed health professional (which he is not) and concluded that David's liver function was down and that he had "heat" in his spleen and bone marrow, "wind" in his stomach, and pressure on his nerves. Triguna recommended dietary changes, "purification" treatment, and various herbal products. David then underwent treatment at the Lancaster clinic and purchased and used *Maharishi Amrit Kalash* and several other products. He also consulted Chopra, who performed pulse diagnosis and provided a mantra for "quantum sound treatment." (This is a technique—also called "primordial sound treatment"—described in one of Chopra's books as "similar to meditation, but . . . prescribed for specific illnesses, including those we consider incurable in the West, such as cancer.") In December 1993, Triguna retested David's pulse and declared that his leukemia was gone. It was not, however, and David died four months later. The suit charged that the $10,000 he spent for ayurvedic services and products was obtained by fraud. Unfortunately, Jonie Flint lacked the resouces to pursue her suit, so the accuracy of her allegations could not be investigated under courtroom conditions.

Whether Chopra practiced medicine after leaving Massachusetts is not clear. In 1995, a reporter who investigated his activities for *New York* magazine noted that Chopra was not licensed to practice medicine in California. When she asked how he could see patients, a Sharp publicist replied, "He sees patients, but not as a doctor."

As far as I know, Chopra has stopped seeing patients but devotes his time to writing, lecturing, and other promotional activities. In 1997 (October 27), Newsweek reported that he charged $25,000 for most of his lecture programs. He parted with Sharp in 1996 and became "educational director" of the Chopra Center in La Jolla, California. A press release describes the Center as "a 14,000-square-foot haven for relaxation and healing . . . featuring educational programs for the integration of mind, body, spirit, and environment." Chopra's web site has stated that that the treatments will:

- Enliven the connection between body, mind, emotions and spirit
- Reduce stress and increase creativity through meditation and creative visualization
- Restore balance and vitality with nutrition and herbs
- Enhance strength and flexibility through yoga and exercise
- Consciously use the 5 senses to energize and purify the mind and body
- Remove emotional roadblocks to improve communication skills and realize greater personal and career achievements.

Other goodies on Chopra's site have included an an interactive Body Type Test, the Chopra Center Store of Infinite Possibilities, from which products could be ordered, and Testimonials from four people who were treated at the center. One, a golfer, reported that he had just shot

the best 18-hole round of his life. In December 2004, I conducted a Medline search to see whether Chopra had published any data in scientific journals. I found none.

Significant Risk

In 2003, a survey of Ayurvedic herbal products manufactured in South Asia and sold in Boston-area stores found that 14 of 70 products (20%) contained concentrations of lead, mercury, and/or arsenic that—if the products were taken according to directions—would exceed published regulatory standards. The authors also noted that ayurvedic theory attributes important therapeutic roles to mercury and lead and that perhaps 35-40% of medicines in the Ayurvedic formulary contain at least one metal. The authors concluded that users of Ayurvedic medicine may be at risk for heavy metal toxicity, and testing of Ayurvedic HMPs for toxic heavy metals should be mandatory. Several studies done in other countries have had similar findings. [Saper S and others. Heavy metal content of ayurvedic herbal medicine products. JAMA 292:2868-2873, 2004] Because Ayurvedic medicine relies on nonsensical diagnostic concepts and involves many unproven products, using it would be senseless even if all of the products were safe.

■

Brahminism

Brahminism is nothing but a crafty profession under the guise of religion and has knack of appearing under false pretences. It is gross and sexual, and yet appears to be refined and spiritual. It is vicious and crooked and yet pretends to be moral; worldly and yet seems to be religious. Such a system should be destroyed ruthlessly for the very spirit of Brahminism is inimical to the good of humanity. It represents a feudal form of capitalism and exploits the wealth of the rich under the form of Dakshina which is the life force of Brahminism.

R D Karve
Reason, Oct 1932

Religious Blindness

The will to believe induces in religious people a variety of blindness for which there seems to be no cure. Apparently educated people, whom one would expect to be acquainted with at least the elements of logic, will, with the utmost seriousness make the most ridiculous statements which will send the non-believer into convulsions of laughter.

R D Karve
Reason, Jan 1935

Objections to 'Faith'

Now hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what he sees?

Romans 8:24–25

There are thousands of variations of religion, which suggests that its roots lies in something inherent in the human animal brain, albeit a misinterpretation of some natural by-product of natural selection but the fact that there are so many variations attests to its falsehood. They can't all be right. It is perhaps an artifact of expanding consciousness or an expression of humanity wondering about its place in the universe but one that is observed through religious falsehood. We all may share a sense of the numinous but it doesn't mean we're all right about its interpretation. Why should Christianity be any more relevant than Navaho beliefs? Only because certain men say it is and nothing more.

When backed into a corner the theist will then produce what he considers to be his trump card. That trump card is 'faith'. By using the word 'faith', the theist is actually agreeing with the atheist. '*You're right, there is no evidence that proves my god exists*.' Faith is the last redoubt, the last rampart to hide behind. As there is no evidence for god, the atheist is told, often in patronising tones, to accept the vacuous idea of faith, which is nothing more than wishful thinking. Faith is a desire, a hope that something might turn out to be true against all evidence to the contrary. A theist may believe that god exists, may have faith, but nothing is there save dreams and phantoms.

Bertrand Russell said:
We may define 'faith' as a firm belief in something for which there is no evidence. When there is evidence, no one speaks of 'faith'. We do not speak of faith that two and two are four or that the earth is round. We only speak of faith when we wish to substitute emotion for evidence.

Something quite bizarre as well as revealing happens when a priest lectures his congregation about faith. What he or she is saying is that it's better to believe through faith than evidence because there isn't any of the latter. It's an admission that the answers are unavailable. Faith is a magician's trick, a sleight of hand used to confuse and befuddle. Derren Brown, in his television programmes, tells the audience that all he does depends on mind tricks and psychology. If only the priesthood could be that honest. Interestingly, in one of his shows, Derren Brown used psychological techniques to make believers out of atheists and atheists out of believers. If it's that easy, surely religious experience has a more prosaic source than believers contend. Put simply, theists have been duped.

When a man who, say, is supposed to have killed his wife is brought before a court, the jury demand evidence for the charge – even a jury made up entirely of theists. No one would accept the accusation of murder if the prosecution said they had no evidence to back it up but they did have faith that he was the murderer. Nothing else, just faith. Not a court in the land would find the alleged murderer guilty. But this is exactly what happened in the witch trials. The prosecution in such cases were simply acting on faith. Look at the destruction their faith caused. If all the theist has is faith, they have nothing at all.

Dan Barker in *Losing Faith in Faith: From Preacher to Atheist* wrote:

The only proposed answer was faith, and I gradually grew to dislike the smell of that word. I finally realized that faith is a cop-out, a defeat – an admission that the truths of religion are unknowable through evidence and reason.

It is only un-demonstrable assertions that require the suspension of reason, and weak ideas that require faith. I just lost faith in faith. Biblical contradictions became more and more discrepant, apologist arguments more and more absurd and, when I finally discarded faith, things became more and more clear.

Faith is often a motivator for war. We have seen this recently in the invasion of Iraq. President Bush talks about faith in his actions and faith in god who told him to invade. Stirring up the national psyche on the basis of faith is both idiotic and lethal. People die over unsubstantiated nonsense. (How can that be moral?) Faith can supposedly move mountains but why does that have to include mass slaughter? Through faith, humanity can be duped into religious or political compliance.

■

SUPERSTITIOUS GANGSTERS

Ritesh Shah

Believe it or not, criminals are as superstitious as politicians or businessmen. If you see a man in Ahmedabad running with a pig, and suddenly turning to the east to burgle a house just because the pig had turned east, don't take him for an actor. He is most likely a thief of the Chiklikar gang observing gang's superstition of following the pig to decide which house to rob next.
The Chiklikar gang is the largest and most notorious thieves' gang in Gujarat. The members of this gang specialise in breaking into shops and houses to steal valuables. A gang member said "we carry a pig along with us before a robbery. Whatever we earn, we offer to our 'Mataji' (the Goddess)."
Many gangs operating in the city have rituals specific to 'Kali chaudas' (the night before Diwali) The Jambua gang, which is based in Madhya Pradesh, worships its deity for at least 5 hours on the night of Kali chaudas before committing high way robbery.
After the 5 hour Pooja, the gang breaks open a coconut and allows one of the broken part to fall. The gang decides to commit a robbery in the same direction in which the coconut part rolls away. Another gang based in Dahod listens to the chirping of a particular bird when it wants to commit a robbery. It decides to rob some place in the same direction from which the bird's chirping is heard. The members of this gang specialise in robbing factories and are known to assault and rob travellers too.

Courtesy: DNA

■

Human Psyche

Khalid Sohail

There was a time in history when human psyche was believed to be a soul. Religious people believed that soul was independent and existed prior to the existence of the body. It entered human fetus at a certain stage of development, stayed in the body throughout life and left at the time of death to go back to the world of souls, so that it could be judged on the Day of Judgment and enter hell or heaven depending on its good and bad deeds. Such a concept of soul was predominantly popular in Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities.

Alongside this Juda-o-Christian-o-Islamic belief in soul, there were many Hindus and Buddhists who followed the tradition of reincarnation and believed that human soul returned to earth again and again to purify itself and acquire a higher or lower level of existence depending upon the good and bad deeds, the karma of the previous incarnation. This cycle of existence and suffering continued until the soul acquired enlightenment and found nirvana and then transcended the cycle of suffering by joining the Ultimate Soul, God. After acquiring nirvana the soul found eternal life and did not have to return to earth for any more suffering.

In these models, religious as well as spiritual, there was a desire, a wish, a hope, and a dream for humans to have eternal life and live forever. Since human body was mortal human beings believed in immortal soul and connected that belief with the belief of immortal and eternal God.

In the last few centuries there has been a third model that is becoming more popular in the world. It is the secular model. Followers of such model call psyche, mind, not soul. In this model the mind is intimately connected with the body and does not exist independent of body. It is an extension of the body, related to the functioning of the brain and is connected with human personality that makes choices of human lifestyle.

Secular model, in which human psyche is called human mind has been developed because of the advances of

…biologists like Charles Darwin
…psychologists like Sigmund Freud
…sociologists like Karl Marx
and
…existentialist philosophers like Jean Paul Sartre

Since secular people do not believe in life after death, they try their best to make their lives more meaningful and create a paradise on earth.

Based on these secular models contemporary mental health disciplines of psychiatry, psychology, nursing and social work have adopted a model that we call a bio-psycho-social model. According to this model mental illness and emotional problems can be diagnosed and treated based on biological, psychological and social understanding of the problems.

People suffering from schizophrenia and manic depressive illness might have a strong biological component as they might have inherited mental illness from their parents that have transmitted the illness through genes and these patients might have biochemical abnormalities

at birth that were later on vulnerable to the psychological and social stresses. Similarly people with neurotic and personality disorders might have experience emotional abuse or trauma as children growing up in dysfunctional and unhealthy families. Similarly immigrants might have emotional and social problems because of their difficulties adjusting to a new culture and not being able to resolve social and cultural conflicts. Secular mental health professionals try to find different factors that contribute to the emotional conditions and then suggest a combination of:
- Medications for biochemical disorders
- Psychotherapy for psychological problems
and
- Family and group therapy to resolve social conflicts.

Such bio-psycho-social model has been very effective in helping people suffering from mental illnesses and emotional problems.

In the last few decades there has been an ongoing dialogue between professionals and lay people, mental health workers and patients about the similarities and differences in their belief systems. Different professionals have adopted different attitudes. I know some psychiatrists and nurses who refuse to discuss their religious, spiritual and secular beliefs with patients as they feel it is not important for their treatment plan. In my clinical practice if my patients ask my views directly I share with them that I am a secular humanist that respects people from all religious, spiritual and secular traditions and support people in searching their own truth. I believe that there are as many truths as human beings and as many realities as pairs of eyes in this world.

Most of my patients are believers but we have mutually respectful relationship with each other. I share with them that my role in their life is not to get in any academic discussion about their ideology or philosophy. I am there to help them in reducing their emotional suffering whether depression, or anxiety, paranoia or marital problems, and improving their quality of life.

While there are some atheist psychiatrists who discourage their patients to attend church gatherings, I never object to it as I believe that their attending church services offer them emotional and moral support as long as their religious relatives and friends do not object to the psychiatric treatment they are receiving.

I remember the time when my aunt in Pakistan suffered from schizophrenia. She was seen by a psychiatrist and was prescribed Modecate injection and supportive therapy. My uncle, who was a religious man, asked my opinion about taking her to see a spiritual healer because she had a lot of faith in him. I told my uncle that I did not object her going to see the spiritual healer if that is what they wished, as long as she took her Modecate injection and followed her psychiatric care plan regularly. It was interesting that a time came when Modecate injections were not available in Pakistan. My aunt started to regress and started having her psychotic symptoms and inappropriate behavior although she was still going to see her spiritual healer. My aunt's illness became a great concern for the whole family. On my uncle's request I sent Modecate injections from Canada and when my aunt started taking the injections regularly she started to improve. After that experience my aunt and uncle agreed with me that the psychiatric treatment was the cake and the spiritual practices the icing.

If we see the contemporary world we see all the religious, spiritual and secular practices

existing side by side.

Some people believe in a soul and the Day of Judgment
Some people believe in a soul and re-incarnation
and
Some believe in a mind that exists as an extension of body and brain that dies when the person dies. They do not believe in life after death and Day of Judgment.

Being a secular humanist and psychotherapist I belong to the third group but I have no hesitation in serving people from the first two groups. That is my way of serving humanity and people from all walks of life because as a physician I want to help people reduce their suffering and discover a healthy, happy and peaceful lifestyle. I am a psychotherapist, not a priest, and more concerned about caring for their minds than saving their souls.

■

Guru Craze in Western India

The drift towards obscurantism and vague fascination for all that is occult and against reason has led to blind worship of imposters even by a large section of educated people in this country. It was curious to note that reason played a negligible factor in guiding the actions of a vast majority of people. In spite of their education they were as gullible as the most ignorant villagers and chose to be driven blindly in the field of politics, religion and other matters by self styled leaders who claimed to have derived inspirations from mysterious sources. The increasing following of such cultsas Theosophy, Vedantism and what for want of a better word, we may call Vevekanandism, is due to the same intellectual or "quasi" intellectual movement.

Dr. RP Paranjapye
Reason, Oct-Nov 1934

Reason and Politics

It may perhaps be agreed that the first requisite for scientific reasoning is a regard for truth, and as politics as practiced at present has nothing to do with truth. It is better for scientific writers to leave politics out of consideration. This would be correct argument if it was assumed that the truth is undesirable in politics, as some politicians will certainly openly assert, and the others will prove by their conduct that they agree with this opinion for all practical purposes. Even if some rationalists may seriously take the view that since means have to be adopted to ends, it is quite legitimate to cheat your enemies in the time of war and since nobody can say when war will break out, it may be considered legitimate at all times even if this is not always considered as a preparation for aggressive war, but simply as a defensive measure against wily enemies.

R D Karve
Reason 15 Jan 1932

Hindu Mathematics – How Original Was It?

Pervez Hoodbhoy

In a world finely divided on issues of culture, politics, religion, and race, it is a relief to know one thing that stands above them – mathematics. The diversity among today's mathematicians shows that it scarcely matters who invents new concepts or proves new theorems; cold logic is immune to the prejudices of arbitrary whim and historical accident. And yet, over the ages, many were the ways by which different families of the homosapien species distilled the essence of the cosmos to capture the magic of numbers.

"Mathematics in India?" by Kim Plofker, a German professor specializing in the history of mathematics, shows just how different one of these ways was and how culture and mathematical development can be intimately connected. This carefully researched chronicle of the principal contributions made by a great human civilization covers the earliest days of Indian history through the beginning of the modern period. Somewhat regrettably, it stops short of the period of the legendary mathematician, Ramanujan (b. 1897) whose name still appears in published papers.

Plofker's book fulfils an important need in a world where mathematical historiography has been largely shaped by the dominance of the Greco-Christian world view and the Enlightenment period. Too little has been written on the mathematical contributions of other cultures. One reason for neglecting Indian mathematics was Euro-centrism – British colonial historians in India generally paid little attention and assumed that the natives had been too preoccupied with spiritual matters to make significant contributions in the exact sciences. Another reason is that many ancient Indian mathematical texts have long been extinct. Often the only indication that they once existed comes from scholars referring to the work of predecessors from an earlier age.
As Plofker wryly notes, two historians of Indian mathematics recently published articles in the same edited volume wherein the estimates of their subject's origins differed by about two thousand years.

Nevertheless, Sanskrit texts that survived the ravages of time reveal a rich tradition of Indian mathematical discoveries for well over 2500 years. In the Early Vedic period (600-1200 BC), a decimal system of numbers had already been established in India together with rules for arithmetic operations, (*ganita*) and geometry (*rekha-ganita*). These rules were encoded into a complex system of chants, prayers, hymns, curses, charms, and other religious rituals. For example, acclamations of praise to the air, sky, times of day or heavenly bodies were expressed in powers of ten that went to a trillion and more. Cryptic phrases called sutras contained arithmetic rules for activities such as laying out a temple building or for arranging a sequence of sacrificial fires.

As in other agricultural civilizations, Indian mathematics probably emerged in response to real needs such as measuring land areas and keeping track of financial transactions, incomes and taxation. A rigid caste and class hierarchy reserved the mystery of numbers for elite Brahmins. High status was accorded to the custodians of jealously guarded secrets. There was immense fascination with large numbers. Thus it is said that the young prince Buddha successfully competed for the hand of beautiful princess Gopa – he could recite a number table that included names for the powers of ten going up beyond the 20th decimal place, in addition to outshining his virile and handsome rivals in the martial arts.

The desire to preserve power also meant that the mathematically knowledgeable did not strive to make its communication easier. Modern mathematicians, used to simple tabular expressions, will find quite perplexing the rhythmic chant of the famous Aryabhata (5th century AD): *makhi-bhakhi-phakhi-dhaki-nakhi-nakhi-nakhi-hasjha-skaki-kisga-sghaki-kighva-ghaki*…(225-224-222-219-215-210-205-199-191,…). This chant, containing values of sine differences (in arc minutes), would be memorized by aspiring mathematicians in much the same way as verses of the Gita.

The book details the impressive achievements of Indian mathematicians: Aryabhatta, Brahmagupta, Mahavira, Bhaskara, Madhava…until the Sanskrit tradition finally became irrelevant with invasion of modern mathematics from Europe in the 19th century. Among prominent Indian achievements is discovery of the solution to indeterminate equations and the development of infinite series for trigonometric quantities.
Discovered by the Kerala school (14th century) of Madhava, these series build upon the work of Bhaskara-II. By an ingenious computation of a circle's circumference by polygonization, Madhava was able to arrive at a numerical value of pi correct to the 11th decimal place. Indeed, a few significant developments preceded those in Europe. Intrigued by rules he discovered in an unnamed Sanskrit text, Reuben Burrow, a British mathematician posted in Bengal as an instructor in the engineers corps, wrote a paper in 1790 entitled: "A Proof that the Hindoos had the Binomial Theorem?.

But how Indian was early Indian mathematics? Did it evolve in parallel or did it absorb ideas and knowledge from elsewhere? Cultural pride creates its own versions of truth. In a recently re-invigorated India, many wish to believe that that all worthwhile mathematics originated in ancient India. But this book may not please them. Plofker is not ready to certify that the concept of zero was an Indian invention; it could well have been conveyed by Chinese Buddhist pilgrims. Nor is she willing to believe that differential and integral calculus was anticipated in India ahead of Leibnitz and Newton.

The chapter "Exchanges with the Islamic World? is of particular significance. The Muslim conquest of India brought with it the Islamic mathematical tradition. Built upon the foundation of Greek mathematics, Muslims had made important advances between the 9th and 13th centuries. Greco-Islamic and Indian mathematics were structured quite differently with the former emphasizing proof and the latter result. Probably because of Islamic influence, Indian ideas of the nature of mathematical proof moved in the direction of greater rigour.

The book carefully separates fact from hyperbole, copiously quoting formulae. This makes it heavy reading in many places, and one wishes that it had been interspersed with vignettes and light anecdotes. It is more of a research monograph than a popular book. But that is the price that scholarship often exacts.

From this book one understands in fine detail how the early development of Indian mathematics was influenced by the need to build temples of specific proportions, astrological imperatives, etc. It could be argued that Islamic mathematics also had a religious motivation: the need to know precise times for the 5-times daily prayers, the direction of the Qibla, etc.

But, all said and done, mathematics is mathematics. The bottom line is that a quadratic equation solved by whoever and by whatever means has to give exactly the same solutions.

Mathematics In India?
by Kim Plofker,
Princeton University Press, Jan 2009,
394pp, £28.95

(Reviewed for *Nature* by Pervez Hoodbhoy, Department of Physics, Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan).

Rationalism

Rationalism is the belief that the world we live in can be understood by the use of Reason. The rationalist argues for a rational approach to human problems, proposes reasoned alternatives to religious dogmas, aims to advance a secular system of education and wishes to defend freedom of thought and civil liberties. Reason is a tool for solving problems, creating strategies, debunking nonsense and undermining dogmas. However, feeling, compassion and imagination are also important in driving and enriching our actions and thoughts. The strength of reason is that it is a powerful tool of understanding and a means of arriving at rational decisions. Human choices are not always made with complete rationality, but it is preferable to aim for the reasonable than to choose without thought.

The scientific process is powered by the use of reason. Much progress has come through scientific understanding, although the application of science, such as atomic explosions or genetic modification, can sometimes be dangerous. Imagination and empathy enable us to envisage the outcome of the application of science. The arts too can enlarge our concept of being human.

Rationalists have questioned the claims of religious thinkers and religious institutions. They may be agnostics or atheists, but they doubt the claims of the supernatural on the grounds of lack of reasonable evidence. The attitudes and injunctions of religions seem unconvincing when examined in the light of reason. Rationalists envisage that the use of reason will lead to human progress - even if not in a steady upward course. Rationalists reckon that the sum of human progress may be increased by the careful and consistent use of reason.

Soul as Given in Scriptures:
its explanation in present context

Dr. Ravindra Tongaokar

How the idea of Soul generated in ancient minds?
Concept of Soul must have come up in minds of primitive men to fulfill certain needs. When they saw things moving, they thought there must be a mover behind every motion or movement. Material bodies like stones cannot be moved unless moved by some one. When the primitive men saw water flowing in the river or wind blowing around, they thought some body must be doing it. They termed them as a River goddess who makes the water to flow and a wind God (Varun) who makes the air blow. Stars were also Gods as they too moved.

Similarly they thought, behind every action there must be a "Doer". When this very logic was extended to human beings some sort of mover or Doer was thought of and it was termed 'Soul'.

Movement in bodies was considered to be the proof of the presence of Soul in the body, while motionlessness of the body was considered as to be proof of the absence of Soul from the body. That is to say, when the Soul leaves the body, it is the death of that individual.
This belief till continues.

Kenopanishad, one of the principal Upanishads (some of the sacred books of the Hindus) begins with the query: "By whose orders do the eyes see or ears hear or the various organs of the body function?" And, as expected, the answer is: "At the order of the soul".
Another reason why the concept of Soul must have come in the minds of primitive men was to fulfill the desire to tide over death. Since the biological death has been a universal and an unavoidable fact, the desire to continue beyond death could be satisfied only in a special way; and the way out was that although the body dies there is some entity in us that does not die. Such an immortal entity was called Soul.

The soul being unlike the body does not die with the death of the body. So much so that the soul was considered to be imperishable, eternal and immortal.

Thus, **the mover entity** inside the person, of course, an invisible entity, **and the imperishable entity**, surely again an invisible one, were **fused into one entity** called, **Soul.**

Characteristics of Soul:-

- Soul is different from the body it occupies.
- Body is material Soul is spiritual.
- Body is inherently unconscious while soul in conscious.
- Even if the body dies, the Soul never dies.

Bhagwat-Geeta Says- "The Soul is imperishable, no body can destroy it. It is un-destroyable, permanent, beyond the life and death cycle, constant, ancient, passionless, stable and indifferent."

"Weapons cannot cut it, fire cannot burn it, water cannot make it wet, or wind cannot dry it; it is stationary, immobile, forever, all pervading and eternal."

"As the person throws away old clothes and puts on new ones, similarly the Soul leaves the old bodies and enters new ones. No body can see it, no body can describe it, no body can listen to its description, and if anybody tries to describe it no body can understand it." (*Because no body has ever seen it!)*

"Even then it is present in each and every body. It is never born and it never dies, it never comes and it never goes, it is stationary and eternal and even if you kill the body it will not die."

Soul is the real doer of various actions and reaper of the fruits thereof; if the body has weight and other physical properties, the soul has none of them. Because of the Soul, knowledge, thinking, imagination, problem solving, memory, creativity, and various moral and religious functions are possible. Body on its own cannot have any experience. Experience of pleasure, pain and liberation is to be had because of soul only. Life is possible in the body only as long as the soul resides in it. The body dies as soon as the soul goes out of the body.
This is what, Soul is!

Why even educated and scientific minded person, a surgeon like me, believed in the idea of soul?
A medical person like me sees death often. There are some deaths which are instantaneous, that is, a patient just living is no more. The question arises, what is the difference between a just living person and a just dead body? All the matter, the mass and organs of the body are as they were before the death. Then what is missing or has gone out or left the body? If it is some kind of 'Energy' which is termed as 'Soul' then by the law of physics it cannot be destroyed. It can only be transformed in some other form of energy (so called rebirth). Next question is when this energy did or the Soul entered the body? Obviously it has to be when the fertilization has occurred. If this concept of energy is applied to the soul then all the properties ascribed to the soul in the scriptures can be easily explained.

What about the theory of *'Karma'?*
As energy cannot be destroyed, and can only be transformed to other forms, after our death the Soul, being a form of energy has to get transformed in some other form. What determines its transformation is the mass surrounding it.

It is just like electrical energy. This electricity travels hundreds of Kilometers from either a hydroelectric or a thermal power station to our house. But its ultimate transformation, whether it should be transformed into heat or light, or sound or kinetic energy like a moving fan, is determined by the mass surrounding it whether it is a copper wire, tungsten wire, a transistor or an electric motor. Similarly when we die in which form our energy-the Soul- should go is determined by our **body mass** at the end of our life. That is our **rebirth, or so I thought.**

I had my pet theory that when the sperm fertilizes an egg, some energy enters in it. There is a sudden spurt of intense activity and from a single cell, in a short time, a whole individual, may it be a human being, an animal, a bird or an insect, is formed. At the time of death this energy goes out of that body and is transformed in some other form of energy. This energy I called as Soul or *Atman* which just could not be destroyed but only transformed and this is rebirth.

The all pervading energy, is the *Brahman* governed by the God, The Soul is part of this *Brahman.* Similarly what is mass? It is *'Maya'*. There is a saying from the old scripture that God has created this visible world. This concept could be now explained on the basis of Einstein's theory of $E = MC^2$, where E is energy or the God, M is mass or the visible world and C is velocity.

This is the type of explanation which makes educated persons like me to believe in the theory of Soul and *Karma* even in the 21st century.

This is what we want to disprove, because this concept is wrong.

■

Psychology and Religion

Psychology is the greatest enemy of religion and has done it irreparable loss. It has exploded each and every doctrine of religion, and this is why so many religious fanatics of today are so much afraid of the explanations of psychologists like William James and Sigmund Freud, and so vehemently oppose them. "God is the creator of man and man is the creator of God" is a famous - but notorious - psychological paradox, but a little thinking will reveal its truth. Who came to tell mankind that God exists. Nobody but man. Who said that God created mankind? The answer is man again. Then is the name of common sense, what is God but man's own creation and who else is there but man who says God created me? Psychology traces out the element of fear in the backbone of religion; and this the very foundation on which the Temple of Religion stands is the illusory and sure to give one day or the other. It has altogether changed our conception of morality today. In psychology there is nothing like religious morality, but ethical morality of course there is. Fear of punishment and temptation of reward after death, are responsible for religious morality, while sound reasoning mind is the stronghold of ethical morality. To quote Mr. H.G. Wells " We have no use for blind faith today. We think of cleanliness instead of purity, and health instead of chastity."

Psychologically there is no criterion of good and evil. the goodness and badness of our actions is judged by the convention and common acceptance of the society. Shakespeare has truly said " There is nothing good or bad but thinking makes so". But somebody may challenge the accuracy of this statement, and say, "What about conscience, the God-given power to guide our actions?" Thus modifying it we come face to face with another important question whether conscience, as popularly known is born or made. The answer is simple and shall be given by a counter question. Why does a certain section of people shudder at the very idea of pork, and another that of beef while a third one enjoys both of these diets without feeling the slightest prick of its conscience? Whence came the difference in the reactions of these three sections of people cited here? Obviously it is due to the difference of their sense of good and bad that is conscience. The three sections of people are brought up in three kinds of atmosphere of belief and behaviour. Hence conscience is popularly understood, is made and never born. The question of "its being born in man to guide his actions' is clearly fallacious.

A A Khan Usmani
Reason, Jan 1935

An Official Journal of Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samitee, India

THOUGHT & ACTION

Committed to Build Rationalist Society

Issue 1 Vol. 10

Apr- June 2010

In This Issue…..

2	The Power of Superstition in Public Life in India	*Dipesh Chakrabarty*
7	The Appeal of Rationalism to Thinking Mind	*Nihar Ranjan Acharya*
10	Rationalism and Secularism	Dr. *Rajendra Kankariya*
14	The State and the Evil of Drink	*V.R. Krishna Iyer*
17	Views and Reviews of a Rationalist	*Prabhakar Nanawaty*
18	Book Review: Memoirs of a Rationalist	*Y J Mahabal*
20	Morality and Atheism	*Irfan Husain*
22	Faith Vs Wealth	*Satyakam Bharti*
23	Religion: Its Origin and Role	*C G Shah*
26	Homeopathy: Overdosing on Nothing	*Martin Robbins*
30	How I became an Agnostic?	*Keshava Shet Revankar*

Founder
Dr. Narendra Dabholkar

Editorial board:
PK Nanawaty
TB Khilare
Ms Suman Oak

Correspondence:
email: pkn.ans@gmail.com

The Power of Superstition in Public Life in India

Dipesh Chakrabarty

Why are superstitions a part of public life in India? The modern mechanisms for risk-management or "disciplines" ranging from statistics to modern medicine exist side-by-side with superstitions in the country. The answer to why these disciplines have not penetrated into the pores of Indian society lies in the history of political power in India.

It is difficult to use the word "superstition" without imagining quotation marks around it. For, one person's "superstition" is another person's "religion". But broadly speaking, we can use the word "superstition" to refer to practices marked by two features: (a) they entail human beings appealing to supernatural, extra-human forces for positive or negative interventions in their lives, and (b) these forces cannot be systematised into a set of religious doctrines. The second feature is the one that I find most interesting about superstitions.

You can believe in the death of god, the coming of a secular age, the Age of Reason, but you find superstitions in all societies. The little gods or goddesses or demons and devils – or whoever or whatever they are – that we hope will intercede on our behalf when we are in trouble, are so many in number and so indeterminate in nature that you cannot extinguish them all. They are by nature inconsistent and profoundly heterogeneous. That is why they cannot be refuted all at once. You may be superstitious in one context – in a completely secular context like a baseball game, an examination or a job interview – but not in another. Superstitions speak of some perennial and primitive condition of the human being, our deep sense of vulnerability in this world and our hope that miracles can happen at any time that we might in small ways even help in bringing them about. Superstition seems to be a human universal.

The moral-political question is: should superstition be a part of public life? Our private superstitions cause no public anguish. Often, for example, when flying, I steal a glance at the monthly predictions about my life published in the in-flight magazine, while taking care not to let the person next to me see me doing this, for I do it with some sense of shame: it perhaps does not quite go with my image of myself. But then I comfort myself with the thought that the horoscopes are there, not just for myself, a "superstitious Indian", but for the average airlines passenger. Market research must have shown that people feel curious about their own future, that this will make them look at the magazine. (This fact may have even been a factor in determining the advertising rates charged by the publication.) This is superstition as my "private" indulgence in my own hopes and fears. Unless your vision of a desirable society is one made up of hyper-rational atheists, there is no problem with private superstition.

Reason and Public Life

Problems arise when people bring "miracles" into modern public life. We are, understandably, uncomfortable with the president of a country announcing that instructions from god had influenced his decision to go to war (Bruce Lincoln has written a fascinating book on the topic).

We feel uncomfortable because we think that public life is best based on Reason. There is a famous episode in the history of the nationalist movement in India that occurred after an earthquake devastated the state of Bihar in 1934. This was a historic debate between Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore, undoubtedly two of the finest products of the

Indo-British cultural encounter. Gandhi described the disaster as divine retribution for the sin of untouchability that existed in Indian society. Tagore, no less a critic of untouchability, found this remark outrageous as he felt Gandhi was taking India back to the middle ages. Gandhi, on his part, actually made it clear that it was his hope that Indians would be superstitious enough, like him, to believe genuinely that the quake was god's punishment. What worried, Tagore, however, was the public nature of Gandhi's stance and the fact that he, Gandhi, wanted others to share it.

I will not pronounce on the question of who was right, Gandhi or Tagore. My examples will have shown that the name of god can be taken in public life by different kinds of people for different ends, as much in favour of non-violence and social justice as in favour of unjust and unilateral wars. As a historian, I only observe that, whatever our normative positions, superstitions exist in public life in countries, both "developed" and "developing".

In India, of course, superstition and intercession by gods and spirits are a part of not only public life – even "witch hunts" go on in some parts of the country – but of political life as well. To give but a very recent example, The Telegraph reported on March 11, 2008, that a man named Hemant Bohra, a small-time priest at a temple devoted to Krishna, the Hindu god, in Jodhpur had taken to worshipping the chief minister of Rajasthan, Vasundhara Raje, in whose "energy, vigour, and control" and "dazzling" countenance, he had found the manifestation of "shaktiroop Kalyani Devi, the goddess of strength, riding a lion". In 2007, Bohra also published posters that portrayed Raje as "Annapurna (goddess of harvest)". Bohra started a week-long puja (worship) and a 'havan' (ritual ceremony involving the use of fire) on March 6 this year.

The idea was not only to celebrate the chief minister's 55th birthday but also to "wish for the BJP (the Bharatiya Janata Party, the party to which Raje belongs) to win over 108 seats in the assembly elections" scheduled later for the year. Most interesting was the way Bohra's behaviour was both attacked and defended on grounds of democracy. The opposition political party, the Congress, said "such acts (as Bohra's) have no place in a democracy". But the BJP defended Bohra's democratic right to self-expression thus, "The worship is purely an individual's perception. Neither the party nor Madame Raje asked them to worship her. They are doing it on their own." It is even possible that the chief minister is using this to promote herself over other competitors inside the party, for journalists do report dissension within the BJP. "On June 19 last year (2007)", it is reported that "Sheetal Kunwar, wife of BJP leader Jaswant Singh, ...filed a complaint in a local court against Bohra and BJP MLA (member of legislative assembly), the publisher of [a] poster" that depicted Raje as a goddess showering blessings on not only her ministers but being blessed by party leaders such as L K Advani and A B Vajpayee, shown in the images of the gods Brahma and Vishnu, respectively.

One could give numerous other instances. About a decade ago, the country was rife with rumours that images of the elephant-headed god, Ganesh, were found to be drinking milk offered by devotees. Some political parties tried to cash in on the phenomenon. About a couple of years ago, it was reported that a part of the Arabian Sea around Mumbai had lost its salinity through pollution and people rushed to the beaches to hail this as a miracle and to collect, for use at home, bottles of this sea-water miraculously made "fresh". The question I want to raise, though, is this: How do we understand the resilience of superstitions in public and political life in India? Or to put in another way: What is the work that superstition does in Indian public and political life?

Taming Chance

For reasons of time and space, I can only provide a short and summary answer, something like a hypothesis. Superstitions, by their very nature, have to do with increasing our life-chances. They are always worldly: we expect miracle-making powers to intercede in the competition that is life, to enhance our chances for success or survival in whatever is the competitive exercise we are engaged in. The matter at hand could be related to politics, battles, jobs, games, fame and recognition, and so on. My grandmother even used to make her dead children "survive" in an age of high child mortality in India.

They would sometimes visit her from the world of the dead. My childhood was full of stories she would tell of such visitations. Superstitions are the most ancient mechanisms we have for taming chance and managing risks that threaten life and survival. If you grant me the point that risk-perception and management is innate to the human being, superstitions represent the oldest understanding of powers that govern our life-chances.

The question is, why would – in a modern country like India – this understanding that I have called superstition survive or even triumph over the assault of all the modern mechanisms we have developed for risk-management in our worldly lives?

The modern mechanisms for taming chance – just to recapitulate what we all owe to the insights of Michel Foucault and, following him, Ian Hacking – are the disciplines, ranging from statistics to modern medicine, the successful deployment of which across whole sections of populations and through suitable institutions constitutes, in Foucault's terms, "governmentality". There is no doubt that these disciplinary practices create new risks in turn but that only gives rise to newer disciplines or sub-disciplines. The important point is that in the Foucauldian model, governmentality operates within the ambit of another kind of power that, for the purpose of the present discussions, I will call "political".

Political power, in its modern form, is not necessarily new but its fundamental characteristics distinguish it from powers that threaten or enhance life-chances. It is thus not about taming chance. Its primary purpose is to work out provisional but workable answers to how a group of people, for all the inequality and diversity that mark them, could constitute and live as a "moral community". Political power is by nature collective, for it is for the use of a community. It cannot be therefore privatised, whereas taming chance is not necessarily a communal activity – it could be, but is not necessarily so – and can therefore be a private, individual activity as well. Govermentality is effective, it could be said therefore, when the modern strategies of taming chance – the disciplines and their corresponding institutions – are subsumed into the larger project of political power; that is to say, when the task of forming a moral community – crystallised, for instance, in the nation state – assumes hegemony in our efforts towards a collective life. This situation occurs when you have an effective rule of law – an expression of a moral/communal project – regulating the institutions through which disciplinary powers operate.

Superstitions do not necessarily die out as a result of this. The attempt here is to marginalise and confine them in the realm of the so-called private. In other words, both the historical development of a conceptual and real distinction between "political power" and "governmentality" and their subsequent articulation (with disciplinary institutions harnessed to the project of forming a moral community, however internally differentiated and unequal) are the necessary pre-condition for disciplines displacing superstitions as our primary

instrument for taming chance in pursuit of well-being (Needless to say that what I explicate here is an ideal-type situation and its logic and not any particular historical reality.)

In Indian modernity, the nationalist project of making political power the hegemonic form of power in public life never quite succeeded. The very nature of political modernity was such that the project of welding Indians into a moral/ political community – the question of political power – could never be properly distinguished from the various strategies of power that were and are about enhancing life-chances. Conceptually, these are different projects. Let me first of all quickly explain what I mean when I say that this distinction between political power and the powers that enhance our life-chances was never clearly articulated.

The historian, Shahid Amin, once wrote an essay in an early volume of Subaltern Studies that by now has earned the status of a classic, an essay documenting and detailing many of the rumours by which peasants attempted to describe the power of Mahatma Gandhi to one another as they responded to his call for nationalist action in the early 1920s. Amin's essay clearly showed that, in getting drawn into the sphere of "the political", Indian peasants assimilated Gandhi's power with that of village gods and ghosts, in other words, to miraculous powers that could affect their life-chances. Peasant descriptions of Gandhi's power would speak of such power in terms of its capacity to affect a person's well-being. People would lose their life and limbs; it was said for example in many of these rumours, if they did not follow the Mahatma's instructions.

Political Power vs Pleasing God

You might think it was simply the "ignorant" peasants who did that. Had they been properly educated, they would have thought differently. I would disagree and ask: What about Mahatma Gandhi himself? Why would he say in 1934, that he hoped that other Indians would be superstitious enough to think of the Bihar earthquake as divine punishment for the sin of untouchability? You may counter that that was Gandhi using "superstition" simply in an instrumental way to communicate his political message to the unlettered masses. But I would again have to disagree and point out that Gandhi's greatness lay precisely in the fact that he was morally incapable of being instrumental in his use of reasoning. Making instrumental use of superstition would have violated his moral refusal to make a means/end distinction in either public or personal life. In fact, the logic of his statement runs exactly counter to Foucault's on the relationship between political and bio-power.

Disciplinary societies function as such, I have argued, because they subordinate bio -power, the life-enhancing use of modern disciplines, to political power, that of the forming a moral, self-governing community. Gandhi was arguing the opposite by subordinating political power to the powers that govern our life-chances. If we did not solve the problem of untouchability – that is to say, if we did not form the right kind of moral community out of Indians – then, Gandhi was saying, we would endanger our lives by courting divine anger. Pleasing god, in order to survive, was a higher objective in this schema than removing untouchability. That Gandhi thought of god himself as always moral, or at least as always opposed to untouchability, is a different question.

Gandhi was and remains, of course, a unique individual, always atypical. However, if we take his stance as a symptomatic or even allegorical representation of the history of the modern political sphere in India, a deeper question arises. All the institutions that Foucault wrote about came to India during the colonial rule and after. There was also no dearth of middle- or upper-class leaders (including Tagore or Nehru) who desired the disciplines to work and

become the new ways of taming chance. Nationalist novels often saw modern medicine and the modern doctor as the antidote to superstition. Yet these disciplines today exist side by side with ancient methods of managing powers that threaten our worldly and physical lives. The modern doctor does not displace the faith-healer. Vaccinations against small pox coexist with the small-pox goddess. Strategies for passing examinations or obtaining jobs could include both secular instruments such as "made-easies" or cheating or bribes and, at the same time, a trip to the temple. If the disciplines have not penetrated into the pores of Indian society and replaced earlier practices that served their function, the answer has to be sought, I am suggesting, in the history of "political power" in India. Power in the domain of politics was assimilated in Indian nationalism and democracy to imaginations of the powers that were seen as governing people's life-chances.

Politics, in other words, became yet another resource in the pursuit of wellbeing and not a separate project by which the state and its rule of law could be expressive of a new idea of India as a "moral community". The continuing salience of superstitions in Indian public life thus invites us to ask questions about what constitutes "the political" in India.

Courtesy: Economic & Political Weekly

■

Remembering B Premanand

When I read about the sad demise of B. Premanand, tears rolled down my cheeks!

He was not only a strong rationalist but also an indomitable fighter against blind faith and a crusader of Babas and Buwas, misleading the credibles in the name of non-existing God and time-barred religion. I had correspondence with him and was a reader of his 'Indian Skeptic' for several years. Despite being an editor, he was very humble in his letters to me, a commoner by any standard. He lived a life of constant fight with religionists, God-believers, soul-worshippers or in short against ALL irrational and fake matters attempted to be kept before the society as FINAL TRUTHS!

His death is a loss not only to India but the entire world of non-believers!
My countless PRANAMS to Him!

Y J Mahabal
762/763, Sadashiv Peth,
Laxmi Narayan Apartments,
Kumthekar Road, PUNE, 411030

■

The Appeal of Rationalism to Thinking Mind

Nihar Ranjan Acharya

'Rationalism' is not speculation – it is utterly practical. It is not a philosophy – it is very down-to-earth. It wants to transform people, not just to stuff their minds with futile, impotent ideas. All ideas of religions as such are impotent. They pretend much, but when you go deep into them, you will always find them empty of all reality. They promise, but they never deliver. They create beautiful mansions in the air. They are artists in creating dreams. And those who become enchanted with those dreams are very unrealistic, because their lives will be wasted. And by the time they become aware that they have been chasing dreams, it will be too late. They never come face to face with reality. And it is only reality that liberates.

Rationalism is not an "ism" as such. It is a practical methodology. If you understand its ways, it is going to transmute you from lower animal to higher asking animal. It is not interested in giving you great ideas. Its basic emphasis is how to give you a little more awareness. As you know, an ounce of awareness is far more valuable than the whole Himalayas of philosophy. An inch of becoming more conscious is far better than travelling thousands of miles in your dreams. Rationalism is more scientific than philosophic – scientific in the sense that the criterion of truth has to be a practical result.

A rationalist carries all symptoms of a good citizen. He is one who contributes his best for the well-being of the family, society and the country of which he is an integral part. He has responsibilities towards his family and the nation. He is not concerned about his well-being only, but also about the larger good of the society and the country. Through love, truthfulness, selfless service and hard work, a rationalist hammered out a rich, beautiful and glowing personality, the like of which can be found only in centuries. A rationalist never promotes blind faith in so-called miracles and other supernatural phenomena and thereby strictly denies the dependency on god men, magicians, tantriks, and other power brokers; curtails freedom of thought and action; subdues intelligence and quest for inquiry; inhibits mental development especially in children and emerging youths. A rationalist knows that blind faith could destroy people's health, as happened in Mumbai when gullible people began drinking the dirty sea water; it could destroy people's wealth, as when precious milk went down the drain in the belief that idols were drinking it; it could even destroy lives, when the gullible sacrifice children's lives on the advice of so-called god men and tantriks. If one must believe in miracles, it is best to believe in the miracle of life, in the miracle of the human body, and strive to find ways to bring down child mortality check female infanticide and keep humans away from deadly diseases. And it is best to believe in the miracle of the universe, and strive to explore the secrets that lie strewn in the great expanse of the universe.

Several biologists tell us today that we do not know much about the science of the human being in depth. We are only scratching the surface of this great science, whereas this is the science that Rationalism teaches us. It is a science; a science of man in depth, dealing with man's all round growth and all the blessings that follow from that growth. Hence, it can be studied, controlled, communicated, checked and verified. That is how the rationalism developed this profound science of man in depth, so that a human being can grow beyond the limitations placed by the so-called religion and so-called religious people.

Knowledge is to know what you do not know. And you will never know unless you ask questions. This is rationalism which teaches us to ask questions so that on the process we will arrive at the truth. He who does not ask questions is a fool of a lifetime. I believe that rationalists are the most evolved 'asking animals' on this planet. And being the most evolved species, a rationalist should go for the meaning of any word used in any context, even for the implied meaning of word instead of catching the word alone.

Throughout history, from the time of Socrates to our modern age brainy individuals have sought answers to the fundamental questions of life. Rational human beings who are brave and bold are basically investigating, inquiring and science loving individuals. Socrates of Athens and Bruno of Italy had to die as they tried and asked awkward questions. Socrates was trying to awaken his fellow Athenians who were under the grip of ignorance. Bruno was trying to open and widen the path of science and in the process the wrong doings of the then Papal Administration exposed. Throughout the ages, rationalists are the brave individuals who reformed various things by asking questions. Rationalists counter superstition, aim to promote an open and just society, endorse scientific method and recognize the importance of human emotions and imaginations.

Being a rationalist, if I say that the so-called creator 'god' is nothing but our creation like a conjurer's illusion; and like an amnesic conjurer who has forgotten his own sleight of hand, we take the illusion for reality. When religion says god is omnipotent, there I would like to put a question – could god build a wall so high that he could not jump over it? If he were omnipotent, he could build such an unjumpable wall. But by the same token of his omnipotence, he could jump over it. What the debaters did not see was that both the walls, and its Athletic Builder, were equally figments of their imagination - as was the debate. The moral problems of god's existence centre around the question: if a benevolent and all-powerful god exists, why does he allow bad things to happen to good people? The answer often provided is that it's all part of a divine plan which we can't see and therefore can't understand. This makes god sound like a Big Brother who works strictly on a need-to-know basis while manipulating our minds and actions. Here, **Periyar's** slogan needs to be addressed: **Forget God; Think of Humanity.**

Science has triumphed over so many things and human being can be invisible, thereby diminishing god's kingdom. A recent breakthrough has kindled hopes of fusing fact with fiction in times to come. Scientists at the University of Berkeley in California, USA announced that they were very close to developing materials that could render people invisible. The team led by Xiang Zhang has come out with a material that can control the direction of travel of visible light. It can bend itself around objects, thus hiding them from view. A cloak made from such material could render anything from people to large objects like ships and tanks invisible. The startling find has caught the fancy of the old and young alike.

We see objects because they scatter the light that strikes them, reflecting some of it back to the eye. But the wonder material, also know as 'meta-material', curves light waves completely around the object like a river flowing around a rock. An observer looking at the cloaked object would then see light from behind it – making it seem to disappear. The object would not even cast a shadow.

So, the technology is promising and breakthrough is breathtaking, but what about its applications? Apart from the very obvious military applications what, if any, real-life

applications of an invisibility cloak one could think of. Perhaps an invisibility cloak on all the dirt and muck around us would make our lives so beautiful. The slum just facing our posh colony or the stinking potholes on the roads, the idols that are dominating, neglecting human lives could be easily taken care of. Poverty, pollution, corruption, illiteracy, the concept of god – all gone the moment we drape an invisibility cloak around them.

Today, we have a society where, in spite of all the gadgets of civilizations, there are so many human problems and, above all, the threat of nuclear war and civil violence. The hand that rocks a cradle and the hand that throws a bomb and kills a whole family – in both you can see the same hand; but it is rationalism which teaches us how to change this hand to that hand? I often quote Bertrand Russell in this connection. He was an agnostic, not a man of religion, but seeing the post-war situation, he says in his book entitled *Impact of Science on Society*: 'Unless man increases in wisdom as much as knowledge, increase of knowledge will be increase of sorrow.' A rationalist should adopt this teaching of Russell and practice being more loving. To practice being more loving, create a love account. Each day, make a few deposits in this very reserve by doing something small to add joy to the life of someone around you. The means to gain happiness is to throw out for oneself like a spider in all directions an adhesive web of love, and to catch in all that comes.

I would love to end with Periyar's words: Rationalist that I am, I have no attachment what so ever to god, religion, literature or language. I shall talk only of that which is acceptable to intelligence, that which does well to the people and that which enlightens them.

■

Italy: Recession Gloom sparks Astrology Boom

As Italy is struggling to cope with its worst recession since the Second World War, a new study by the European Consumers Association reveals that Italians are increasingly relying on astrologers and fortune tellers rather than bankers to get advice in financial matters. With unemployment and worry about the state of the economy on the rise, the annual budget for magical remedies is touching 6 billion euros, says the study that has been carried out in cooperation with Telefono Antiplagio, a voluntary service that collects reports from victims of con artists.

It's roaring business for the estimated 20,000 wizards in the country, who make their living out of the widespread superstition and gullibility of their fellow citizens. According to the study, each day more than 30,000 Italians – 53 per cent of them women - shed away money for occult services. The usual fees being some 50 euros, prices are going up to about 600 euros. The poor and under-developed south is the most superstitious part of the country, but the wealthy northern and central regions are spending most generously on occultist financial advice. The Lombardy including Italy's financial capital Milan tops the list with 90 million euro per year, closely followed by Lazio, the region around Rome.

■

Rationalism and Secularism: Meaning, Concept & Understanding

Dr. Rajendra Kankariya

Rationalism

Rationalism is "any view appealing to reason as a source of knowledge or justification". In more technical terms it is a method or a theory "in which the criterion of the truth is not sensory but intellectual and deductive". Different degrees of emphasis on this method or theory lead to a range of rationalist standpoints, from the moderate position "that Reason has precedence over other ways of acquiring knowledge" to the radical position that Reason is "the unique path to knowledge". Given a pre-modern understanding of Reason, "rationalism" is identical to philosophy, the Socratic life of inquiry, or the zetetic interpretation of authority (open to the underlying or essential cause of things as they appear to our sense of certainty). In recent decades, Leo Strauss sought to revive *Classical Political Rationalism* as a discipline that understands the task of reasoning, not as foundational, but a maieutics. Maieutics is a procedure of pedagogy. It is based on the idea that the truth is latent in the mind of every human being due to his innate Reason but has to be "given birth" by answering questions (or problems) intelligently proposed.

Background

Since the Enlightenment, rationalism is usually associated with the introduction of mathematical methods into philosophy, as in Descartes, Leibniz, and Spinoza. This is commonly called continental rationalism, because it was predominant in the continental schools of Europe, whereas in Britain empiricism dominated.

Rationalism is often contrasted with empiricism. Taken very broadly these views are not actually exclusive, since a philosopher can be both rationalist and empiricist. Taken to extremes the empiricist view holds that all ideas come to us through experience, either through the five external senses or through such inner sensations as pain and pleasure, and thus that knowledge is essentially based on or derived from experience. At issue is the fundamental source of human knowledge, and the proper techniques for verifying what we think we know.

Proponents of some varieties of rationalism argue that, starting with foundational basic principles, like the axioms of geometry, one could deductively derive the rest of all possible knowledge. The philosophers who held this view most clearly were Baruch Spinoza and Gottfried Leibniz, whose attempts to grapple with the epistemological and metaphysical problems raised by Descartes led to a development of the fundamental approach of rationalism. Both Spinoza and Leibniz asserted that, *in principle*, all knowledge, including scientific knowledge, could be gained through the use of Reason alone, though they both observed that this was not possible *in practice* for human beings except in specific areas such as mathematics. On the other hand, Leibniz admitted that "we are all mere Empirics in three fourths of our actions". Rationalism is predicting and explaining behavior based on logics.

The distinction between rationalists and empiricists was drawn at a later period, and would not have been recognized by the philosophers involved. Also, the distinction was not as clear-cut as is sometimes suggested; for example, the three main rationalists were all committed to the importance of empirical science, and in many respects the empiricists were closer to Descartes in their methods and metaphysical theories than were Spinoza and Leibniz.

Secularism

George Jacob Holyoake (1817-1906), British writer coined the term "secularism". Secularism is the concept that government or other entities should exist separately from religion and/or religious beliefs.

In one sense, secularism may assert the right to be free from religious rule and teachings, and freedom from the government imposition of religion upon the people, within a state that is neutral on matters of belief, and gives no state privileges or subsidies to religions. In another sense, it refers to the view that human activities and decisions, especially political ones, should be based on evidence and fact unbiased by religious influence.

In its most prominent form, secularism is critical of religious orthodoxy and asserts that religion impedes human progress because of its focus on superstition and dogma rather than on Reason and the scientific method. Secularism draws its intellectual roots from Greek and Roman philosophers such as Marcus Aurelius and Epicurus, medieval Muslim polymaths such as Ibn Rushd, Enlightenment thinkers like Denis Diderot, Voltaire, John Locke, James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, and Thomas Paine, and modern freethinkers, agnostics and atheists such as Bertrand Russell and Robert Ingersoll.

The purposes and arguments in support of secularism vary widely. In European laicism, it has been argued that secularism is a movement toward modernization, and away from traditional religious values. This type of secularism, on a social or philosophical level, has often occurred while maintaining an official state church or other state support of religion. In the United States, some argue that state secularism has served to a greater extent to protect religion from governmental interference, while secularism on a social level is less prevalent. Within countries as well, differing political movements support secularism for varying reasons.

Secular society

In studies of religion, modern Western societies are generally recognized as secular. This is due to the near-complete freedom of religion (one may believe in one religion, many religions or none at all, with little legal or social sanction), as well as the general belief that religion does not ultimately dictate political decisions. Nevertheless, the moral views originating in religious traditions remain politically important in many of these countries, such as Canada, France, Turkey, the United States and others. In some, religious references are considered out-of-place in mainstream politics. For example, among the first to delineate the nature of a secular society, D. L. Munby characterizes a secular society as one which

- Refuses to commit itself as a whole to any one view of the nature of the universe and the role of man in it.
- Is not homogenous, but is pluralistic.
- Is tolerant. It widens the sphere of private decision-making.

- While every society must have some common aims, which implies there must be agreed on methods of problem-solving, and a common framework of law; in a secular society these are as limited as possible.
- Problem solving is approached rationally, through examination of the facts. While the secular society does not set any overall aim, it helps its members realize their aims.
- Is a society without any official images. Nor is there a common ideal type of behavior with universal application.

Positive Ideals behind the secular society

- Deep respect for individuals and the small groups of which they are a part.
- Equality of all people.
- Each person should be helped to realize their particular excellence
- Breaking down of the barriers of class and caste.

Secularism can also be the social ideology in which religion and supernatural beliefs are not seen as the key to understanding the world and are instead segregated from matters of governance and reasoning. In this sense, secularism can be involved in the promotion of science, Reason, and naturalistic thinking.

Secularism can also mean the practice of working to promote any of those three forms of secularism. As such, an advocate of secularism in one sense may not be a secularist in any other sense. Secularism does not necessarily equate to atheism; many secularists are religious, while atheists often accept the influence of religion on government or society. Secularism is an essential component of a secular humanist social and political ideology. Some societies become increasingly secular as the result of social processes, rather than through the actions of a dedicated secular movement; this process is known as secularization.

ANS's View of Rationalism and Secularism

After the explanation of rationalism and secularism in the eyes of various philosophers and thinkers, this is proper place to know what the Maharashtra Andhashradha Nirmulan Samiti (ANS) thinks about rationalism and secularism.

ANS is indifferent (neutral) about God and Religion. It means that there will be no performance of rituals of God and Religion on the ANS platform. Similarly ANS will not participate into any religious activities. However if any member of the ANS follows his religion, he is free to do so at his individual level. However he is expected to remain away from such religious traditions which lead to exploitation.

This role of ANS is very much in harmony with the section 25 of the Constitution of India. It states:

- Subject to public order, morality and health and to the other provisions of this part, all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience, and the right freely to profess, practice and propagate religion.

- Nothing in this article shall affect the operation of any existing law or prevent the state from making any law.
- Regulating or restricting any economic, financial, political or other secular activity which may be associated with religious practice.

- Providing for social welfare & reform or the throwing open of Hindu religious institutions of a public character to all classes and sections of Hindus.

But the mere provision of secularism in the Constitution does not bring the secularism in the state or nation. One cannot depend on the state for the secular social existence, because we have very recently seen the cruelty of religious blindness of the Gujarat state.

In other words to what we proclaim religion, that religion has to be scrutinized, diagnosed and examined. We have to oppose and drastically say no to the exploitation through religion. But when we are doing this, with those, who always think of practicing morality and ethics, we have to create a dialogue in between person-person, person-society, person-state, state-society. We have to preach the importance of versatile secularism. In other way the movement of secularism has be correlated with the saints' movement and also with the ideologies of Mahatma Jotirao Phule & Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar who had been inspired by the saints' movement.

The real task is that we people have to propagate that religion is nothing else than awakening of rationalism. Search of truth is the purpose of religion and non-violence is the way to achieve it. God-centered religion has to be made human-centered. This journey from God-centered to human-centered religion will make a human materialistic rather than spiritualistic. This role of activist is the real role of rationalization of religion. The role of rationalist man and the role of real religious man are very similar. Both of them are thinking of a moral, ethical and value based society or the nation. It will help in reducing the strength of those who have religious blindness.

Actually secularism does not mean only the equal sense for all religions or it also does not mean only the separation of politics and religion or secularism is also not pleasing (flattering) the minority and injustice to majority Hindus. Secularism is the provoking thought of what should be the relation in between individual and religion, individual and state, individual and a group and groups of different religions. This thought itself leads to make our own religion very rational and it reduces the unnecessary fear of other's religion. It is to be understood that the direction of secularism, as spelt out in Constitution of India, is not that of eradication (annihilation) of religion but it is of rationalization of the religion. The secularism is not only the system of explaining the relation between state and religion but secularism is the system of explaining the relation of a man with a man. The need of hour is to explain this emotional meaning of secularism, to rationalize the secularism in this perspective and then and then we will realize its social strength.

Dr. Rajendra Kankariya
rdkankariya@rediffmail.com

■

The State and the Evil of Drink

V.R. Krishna Iyer

Kerala is perhaps the "most drunken State" in India, with its per capita consumption of liquor rising by the year. The government, of course, benefits from its monopolistic business arm, the Kerala State Beverages Corporation. The governmental pursuit seems to give the beverages some level of "respectability." Of course the arrangement provides jobs to a number of people in the public sector, but it also makes more young people taste the so-called delights of the drink than would have been the case otherwise.

To set the record straight, it must be stated at the outset that this is not to question or attack the powers vested in the state to regulate any trade in the manner it deems fit. But this is a trade where the turnover tempts the customer to take rolling trips into the realm of the jocose, the lachrymose and then the comatose. Many a fracas, felony, road accident and incident of street violence start with alcoholism. Most rapes and sex crimes happen after intoxicating sip after sip of the liquid. Terrible crimes are committed by drunkards. The jocose first sip, the bellicose second sip, the lachrymose third sip… And with the final gulp you become comatose and lie down somewhere, often not knowing where. If this happens at home, the wife gets beaten if she protests. With much of the income spent on the stuff, the family often ends up bankrupt. Instances of hospitalisation owing to the drink evil seem to be on the rise in the State.

On whom does the blame rest? The State that grants liquor vends and bar licences rarely investigates this aspect. But liquor can be seen to violate the fundamental right of the citizen to travel around in peace, have friendly association with others, and live in fraternity.

Why do even Marxist governments make people bankrupt by granting easy licenses to clubs with liquor-dispensing bars attached to them? I entreat on bended knees that the government's executive wing be rid of this alcoholic curse. And as Morarji Desai had wanted done, judges should be asked to swear not to drink and they should be dismissed summarily if found guilty of habitual alcohol consumption.

In holding almost a monopoly in the sale of these beverages, Kerala is in the company of neighbouring Tamil Nadu, which not only manufactures but vends liquor as a monopoly. The business profits from alcohol consumption belong to the State. Who will dare dismiss a government for violating Article 47 of the Constitution? For there are complicated political equations involved.

Gandhi is dead. So too is Rajaji, who as Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu had implemented a prohibition policy successfully. Even now it can work a la Gujarat. Malabar under Madras had a prohibition policy. It is fair to note that Tamil Nadu is also selling life's essentials through ration shops at a fraction of the market price effectively. Many of the poor can live on thanks to this measure. In Kerala, however, alcoholism and market prices go on without any control.

President Pratibha Patil said at a public meeting that Kerala is plagued by alcoholism. I would add this: the State will perish by alcoholism. The State is ruled by the Left Democratic Front, led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist), but only Marxism that is free from the plague of alcoholism will ultimately survive.

Alcoholism is an unmitigated evil and when it becomes a habit, multiple pathological consequences follow. Criminals and goondas with violent habits have a vested interest in liquor. It is ironic that our governments have become dealers in alcohol, handling the Big Business as a state-run enterprise.

Recently the District Collector of Kozhikode made an attempt to stop the sale of alcohol in liquor shops in the district on the eve of a major festival. It proved successful and ensured peace to the people. But he possibly fell foul with a powerful lobby, and soon found himself transferred out.
When Nehru was in power, Indian Embassies and High Commissionerates were asked not to serve liquor at Republic Day and Independence Day celebrations. The Embassy officials wrote to New Delhi that many local guests may not attend if there was no liquor being served. Nehru promptly replied that if our National Days can be celebrated only if alcohol is served and people are only fascinated by the liquor that is served, then we had better not hold such celebrations.
The one politician who was above and against this vice was Morarji Desai. He introduced dry days on wage payment days and on festival days.

This terrible curse has proved ruinous, and Morarji's wisdom must be enforced as sternly as he did particularly vis-a-vis judges and higher bureaucrats. Wedding celebrations and religious festivals, Deepavali and Onam, should be declared dry days. So far as liquor consumption is concerned, the Centre, if it believes in the Constitution and in particular in Article 47, should force the States to practice prohibition. It can succeed as Rajaji and the Madras State did, and Gujarat still does. Political parties in their election manifestoes must promise dry days to save the working class and ensure domestic peace. Alcoholism is a national enemy and our import policy must ban foreign liquor.

All great men were free from alcoholism: they range from Bernard Shaw to Mahatma Gandhi. From Vedanta to Islam and every faith which is committed to dignity, decency and sobriety has advocated this, too. Some artists, like musicians and poets, have violated this virtue and drunk themselves to death. Byron, for instance, wrote:

"Man, being reasonable, must get drunk;
The best of life is but intoxication."

If the elimination of poverty and bankruptcy will constitute patriotism, the highest priority to implementing this principle should be given to an absolute ban on alcoholism. The issue of dry days read in the light of Article 47 arose came up the Supreme Court at the instance of the liquor lobby. The case was decided by the court in support of the abolition of alcoholism, in 1978 3 SCC 558. That ruling deals exhaustively with the negative aspects of alcoholism as a national disaster.

I hold drink to be more damnable than thievery and perhaps even prostitution. Is it not often the parent to both?

Government revenue from drinking should be swept out and liquor shops should be abolished. We should re-declare our faith in undiluted prohibition. If I were appointed a dictator for an hour for all of India, the first thing I would do would be to close without compensation all liquor shops and destroy all toddy-producing palms. This nation will perish

with the drinking bowl with atrabilious liquor because the powerful lobby can purchase the politician at any price to do away with dry days and flood the youth with liquor until blood colours streets and homes red.

■

Coffee Cup Reading, The Next Big Thing for Soothsayers!

A cup of coffee can now help in predicting your future. Surprised? Coffee cup reading is the new form of occult science being adopted to predict a person's future by reading images formed from the coffee left in the cup.

"When I came to know about this coffee cup reading, I was curious and decided to give it a shot," says Shruti, a college student who visited the 5th Nakshatra pavilion at the World Book Fair in New Delhi. "I'm satisfied with whatever Neera read from my coffee cup. Although everything was not positive, but then life is like that," she said. Not only coffee, even molten candles are now used to predict future. The art Ceromancy involves creation of an aura by lighting up a coloured candle. The molten wax is poured in a bowl full of water. The wax takes up various forms and floats on the water surface. The occultist reads those images and makes predictions.

"Most people who visit me don't know anything about these arts -- coffee cup reading Ceromancy. They come out of sheer curiosity" says occultist Neera Sareen, who practices the two art forms along with tea leaf reading, tarot card reading and various others.

For a session of coffee cup reading and Ceromancy a person is charged a minimum of Rs 500. "Coffee cup reading and Ceromancy are at a nascent stage, so we do not find many occultists practising them," says astrologer and Vastu consultant Devagaya Sanoria. Another astrologer Pandit Vir says, "The two forms are from a group of 300 ways in which predictions could be made."

Noting that it's not the science that is wrong but the person he says, "If the reader is well-versed, then any form of prediction-making elicits correct result most of the times." Interestingly, youngsters, who are believed to be more rational, made a big chunk of clients for the astrologers at Nakshatra. "This year the number of youngsters who visited Nakshatra has soared. I answered queries from around 30 to 40 youngsters each day," Neera says. "Most of them are curious to know about their career and relationships," says Gina Jam, a palmist. According to her, those already in a relation are curious to know whether the compatibility between them would be persistent or will it start fading with time. The Nakshatra pavilion has been attracting a considerable crowd comprising people of all age-groups and sections of the society. The pavilion with around 100 participants offered various forms of future telling -- from astrology to palmistry, numerology, tarot, Feng Shui, reiki, past life regression, gemology and aura reading.

Courtesy: Sakal Times

Views and Reviews of a Rationalist

Prabhakar Nanawaty

First of all we must appreciate the efforts put up by publishers - Rationalist Foundation - for bringing out the *Anthology of articles on Rationalism, Humanism and Secularism* written by an ardent rationalist Justice R A Jahagirdar (Retd). It is surprising to know that except for a few booklets, there were no books to his credit till date though he is writing for last 25-30 years for journals like *Radical Humanist*, *Freedom First* etc regularly. Though late than never, this book, *Memoirs of a Rationalist,* brings out rationalistic views on various burning issues like terrorism, Darwinism, law and order issues, judicial activism etc in a single book. In fact, the issues that were hoisted in the book by the author are not going to vanish as soon as they were raised and commented upon. But they will go on lingering from time to time and it is the duty of thinkers and rationalists to air their views to educate the readers.

The book contains in all 34 articles covering the subjects like biographies, judiciary aspects, science, superstitions, secularism, Indian policing, etc which appears to have been written in last 2-3 years and are still fresh in the minds of the readers. The book covers author's observations on subjects like freedom of press, national anthem, judicial activism, democracy in India, human right issues and United Nation's action, religious conversions, etc. Readers might remember the commentaries made by various experts while these issues were raised. However RA Jahagirdar has something else to say and most of the time reader will feel that he is right. For example, ordinary readers are perplexed when somebody raises the issue of judicial activism. No one is able to give correct definition of judicial activism. As author puts it rightly "The question must be properly understood by all the persons who extol and who criticize judicial activism. It is unfortunate that some people praise judicial activism while some say the judges are acting smart. This is partly because these persons have not understood the system of government envisaged by the constitution and prevalent in the country". While commenting on national anthems in general and Indian national anthem in particular author traces the historical aspects of the anthem sung by Indians. In fact there should not have been any controversies whether it is *Vande Mataram*… written by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee or *Jana Gana Mana*…by Rabindranath Tagore. Both songs have some positive as well as negative aspects. In fact author confirms that "the Constitution of India does not mention anything about national anthem. The law does not say Jana Gana Mana…. is the national anthem. It is recognized as the national anthem on a statement made by Jawaharlal Nehru in the Constituent Assembly on 15 Aug 1948." In fact to dissolve the issue he suggests *Zenda Uncha Rahe Hamara* would have been an apt anthem which may satisfy both BJP and Muslim community.

While reading articles on Shias and Sunnis, or Caliphate, or Portrait of Prophet by the author, one will appreciate his scholarship on Muslim history, detailing and interpretation of Quran etc. Author is wondering about this unnecessary great divide which results into inhuman and heartless act and bloodshed. "Even now after 1300 years, the Muslim community stands divided worldwide into two communities. Both the communities believe in one God; both believe in Muhammad as the lat prophet. But the hatred between the two communities is deep and permanent". He comments that the effort to bring all Muslims and Muslim countries under Pan-Islam has not found a leader or organization. Apart from Osama, the world faces no danger or design from Islam. His opinion punctures the bogey raised by the Western countries and Christian community about the imaginary threat posed if all the Muslim communities joined together. In fact author feels that Osama's efforts for the cause of Islamic

unity and his organization Al Quida has alienated the rest of humanity from Islam. 'Majority of Islamic countries are opposed to the type of terrorism Osama has indulged in'.

The three articles on evolution – *Charles Darwin*, *Evolution, Creation and Intelligent Design* and *The "Monkey Trials*" – sum up the pseudo-scientific arguments of ID supporters to oppose the theory of evolution and Darwin. In fact the article, *The "Monkey" Trials*, brings out the opposition faced by Charles Darwin during his life time for putting forth the theory. Surprisingly even till today the controversy has not yet died down.

While remarking upon the necessity of scientific attitude, author comments that "Science nurtures inquiry; the superstition stifles it. The two are obviously incompatible. To suppress inquiry, freedom of thought, quest for truth is itself immoral and unethical. Supernatural is a foe of science; so also superstition. Every superstition has a shade of supernatural in it; every supernatural is a superstition. To a humanist who believes in autonomy of man both are dangerous".

While commenting upon Secularism, author wonders that "more than 60 years have gone by, yet the meaning of secularism is neither understood nor clear in meaning to politicians and citizens". Like water which takes the colour of the thing it mixed with, secularism takes the meaning of the political party which assigns it. Congress claims it is the secular party; Advani insists that Hinduism, being tolerant is the secular religion; communists say that communism being atheist is secular.

As mentioned in the introduction to book, Justice RA Jahagirdar is a voracious reader and a prolific writer whose articles touch all aspects of life. Being a student of history and philosophy, in addition to law and economics and with an added ability of penetrating logical thinking he throws light on issues and happenings. The articles in the book highlight this aspect. Justice Jahagirdar puts every issue in its proper perspective by exposing and highlighting the facts hidden from the public by interested parties. The book makes a very interesting reading to penetrate the rationalistic attitude of the author.

Memoirs of a Rationalist
- Justice RA Jahagirdar (Retd)
Published by Rationalist Foundation, Mumbai,
2009, pp 192, (Not for Sale)

Prabhakar Nanawaty
pkn.ans@gmail.com

Book Review: Memoirs of a Rationalist

Reading through the above book, I felt strongly that the writer, Justice RA Jahagirdar (Retd) is a scholar not only of history and philosophy but of English language too. I had to consult dictionary for quite a few words. There are however a few errors and points of difference too. The 'r' of Reason, when it means 'talent' ought to be capital. This is 'r' in several places in this book. Other errors will be mentioned later.

On page 5 in the Preface by Dr. Narendra Dabholkar, Dnyaneshwar, Tukaram are mentioned as rationalists. True, their literature does mention atheism; but they were yet God's devotees too; and are respected as such too by the society. How they can be called 'Rationalists' passes my comprehension. That all superstitions rise out of the concept of God is a fact. I too have mentioned this in my article on superstitions published in T&A.

On the cover page of this very valuable book it is mentioned that the book is 'an anthology of articles on Rationalism, Humanism and secularism'. None of the articles in the book are specifically on any one of these titles, the contents of all advocate the cause of these tenets though! Page 52 mentions that India is a secular state in theory and practice, I fail to understand hoe India is so in practice. It is actually the opposite of it or the one that equates secularism to *Sarva Dharm Samabhav* indeed sans meaning. Page 53 uses the pronoun 'it' for the nation Turkey. The word Nation is feminine in English. So, I feel the pronoun 'she' should have been used here.

Page 92 mentions Muslims' opposition to *Vande Mataram*. It is Mahatma Gandhi who buttressed Shaukat Ali and Muhamad Ali, staunch religionists (*Dharmandh*) in this regard. Even Mr. Jinnah had opposed Gandhi's stand. This Gandhi told Gora, he is an atheist and handled MN Roy roughly for not attending the prayer meeting.

An American politics professor's statement on page 103 that India is not a democracy is I think very true. She is neither a democracy nor a true dictatorship too. She is anything but a good country! How is her Lokasabha somnolent, I do not know!

It is very factual to say (page 111) "What is good for man is not dictated by a mythical God! The sooner this GOD is banished, the better will it be for all.

"With a view to attract" (Page 130): According to Nesfield's grammar this should have been "with a view to attracting". The phrase 'with a view to' needs a noun after it, which 'attracting' is.

About Shri Sawarkar (page 138) I have already expressed my differing view.

Page 149: Science is never built up on faith. How true!

May Reason triumph!

Y J Mahabal
762/763, Sadashiv Peth,
Laxmi Narayan Apartments,
Kumthekar Road, PUNE, 411030

The obvious errors mentioned above will be duly intimated to the Publishers of the book.
Editor

Morality and Atheism

Irfan Husain

Consider this demographic projection for the UK, and ponder its implications for a moment: within five years, the majority of babies will be born to unmarried parents. However, before you put this down to yet another example of Western immorality, just remember that all these babies will have the same legal rights as those born to married couples. This trend is part of the wider decline of marriage as an institution. According to a recent study, the figures for people getting married in Britain is at its lowest ever since these statistics began to be compiled nearly 150 years ago.

In 2008, only 21.8 per thousand adult men of marriageable age actually took the vow. At 19.6, the figure for women was even lower. And the average age for men getting married for the first time was 32, and for women it was nearly 30. These figures reveal not so much disillusionment with the institution of marriage, as much as they do a widespread rejection of religion. Church marriages are still favoured by the middle classes, but more for the pomp and glamour of the wedding dress worn by the bride, and the finery sported by the guests. Indeed, attendance for church services has fallen steadily, and most Brits only go to church for weddings and funerals.

A glance at the European table reveals that the belief in a god is generally quite low in all the major countries. Sweden, with only 23 per cent of the population believing in a deity, is the least observant, with the UK at 38 per cent. Germany and France are similarly atheistic or agnostic. Interestingly, Catholic countries seem to be more staunchly Christian, with Poles, Spaniards and Italians being among the most fervent of believers.

Indeed, a lack of belief in a supreme being has long been the hallmark of Western intellectual thought since the Enlightenment of the 18th century. Hence, lawmakers have tried to separate religion form politics, few more so than the Founding Fathers of the United States. Both Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin were fiercely agnostic in their views.

Scientists, too, have tended to question the belief system they were born into, as revealed by this quotation from Albert Einstein: “Science has been charged with undermining morality, but the charge is unjust. A man’s ethical behaviour should be based on sympathy, education and social ties and needs; no religious basis is necessary. Man would indeed be in a poor way if he had to be restrained by fear of punishment and hope of reward after death.”

Many have condemned modern Western civilization for its ‘godless’ ways, pointing to widespread cohabitation between men and women, men and men, and women and women. Alcoholism, nudity and drug-abuse are also frequently cited. All these lifestyle choices are mentioned in arguments over the superiority of Eastern religions and societies. Yet the firm belief in religion and an afterlife in our part of the world do not necessarily translate into better societies.

In the Transparency International table for global perceptions of corruption for 2009, there is not a single Muslim country in the twenty most honest states. However, seven Muslim countries figure among the ten most corrupt states.

Interestingly, Sweden, the most godless state in Europe, comes in at joint third with Singapore as the least corrupt country in the world.

There is an argument that corruption is a function of poverty, and once societies have acquired a measure of economic well-being, they tend to become more honest and accountable. While there is some truth to this assertion, how to explain the fact that Saudi Arabia, one of the richest countries in the world, is listed as 63rd by TI? And Kuwait comes in at 68. Clearly, then, there is little direct linkage between religion and morality.

Nevertheless, billions around the world continue to believe deeply in the faith they have grown up in. They derive comfort from following the belief system of their forefathers, and most of them have never felt the need to question it. Indeed, the poor obtain solace for their wretched condition with the promise of compensation in the afterlife. And the rich in our part of the world try and assuage their guilt by giving alms generously, thereby hoping to buy a place in heaven. If only they would pay their taxes with the same zeal, we might be able to make a better world in this life.

In religiously inclined societies like Pakistan, we are fond of criticising Western materialism, while holding up our supposed spirituality as being superior. Even the millions of Muslims who have chosen to migrate to the West make the same assertion. However, I have not noticed any of these people denying themselves the conveniences and the advantages of these same 'materialistic' societies. And frankly, I do not see too much evidence of our vaunted 'spirituality' in our behaviour or attitudes.

These differences have been sharpened after 9/11, with more and more people in the West now seeing Islam and Muslims as being behind the rise in extremist violence in much of the world. Muslims, for their part, see themselves as victims of a rising Islamophobia. Interestingly, the trend towards atheism and agnosticism is far less marked in the United States than in Europe. Well below five per cent of Americans assert they do not believe in any god.

Indeed, some Evangelical Christians in America think they have more in common with Muslims than the 'godless Europeans'. One reason it is so difficult for many Muslims to become assimilated into the societies they have chosen to live in is the huge cultural differences they encounter. Generally coming from deeply conservative backgrounds, they are shocked with the free and easy lifestyle they encounter. Rather than encouraging their children to integrate, they seek to insulate them from Western values, thus causing a state of mild schizophrenia in second- generation immigrants. Some of these young people become quickly radicalised, and seek clarity in the black-and-white world of religious extremism.

Unfortunately, too many of them lack the education to realise that ultimately, no set of beliefs or values is inherently inferior or superior to another. Morality, as we have seen, is not the monopoly of any faith: an atheist can be more ethical than a religious person. At the end of the day, what matters is that humans behave with consideration and decency, and avoid imposing their beliefs on others.

■

Faith Vs Wealth:
Hundreds of kilo Gold in Hindu Temples

Satyakam Bharti

Himachal's rich temples too poor to afford so, the Himachal Pradesh government is finding it real burdening to manage the hundreds of kilos (above 4 quintals as per official confession) of gold besides tonnes of other precious metals lying in its treasuries. Of course the treasure belongs to the gods and therefore it is certainly even more burdening to be custodian for the All Powerful. And what bright idea it is to bank on bullion reserves temple shrines across the state have – perhaps a godly stimulus for a fledgling mountain economy that is yet to fully integrate itself with the larger speculative world capital market. But money being money, the state government is justified in feeling the heat of more than 410 kg of gold (valued above Rs 70 crore) lying unused with it. Perhaps not a great amount to catapult the state economy into a thriving one, nevertheless a decent amount to do the cleaning job in at least the shrines to which the treasure belongs. According to a report, in 2006, Chintpurni Devi temple, the richest of all shrines in the state, alone made a collection of over Rs 20 crore cash besides more than 20 kg of gold. That is certainly lot of money considering that majority of Himachali companies, if there are any genuine ones, may not be having that kind of yearly turnover.

This would certainly make one believe the shrine might be heaven on earth, or at least a poor imitation of it with decent civic amenities. But that is certainly not the case. A visit to the place would make you realize that on reaching there you would be charged Rs 50 as parking fee and will yet be made to jostle through chaotic traffic of vehicles and humans. And that's just the beginning. The journey up the hillock can be more condescending. The story of filth and poor infrastructure being the same for all shrines in the state. The situation is particularly bad during navratras when lakhs of devotees, most of them from outside the state, flood these temples. The situation becomes so pathetic that it nearly becomes torturous to even pass through these temple towns, leave aside paying obeisance. Though from time to time people have been questioning use of funds generated by these temples, hardly has any such audit ever been made public. The last time a hue and cry was made was after the Naina Devi tragedy but nothing great seems to be happening. The temples are collecting public money and therefore the public needs to be informed how this money is being spent.

Leave aside providing world-class infrastructure, the temple managements can at least assure cleanliness, and I am sure the crores that devotees donate are enough for this job. It would have done a great service to the devotees had the government announced that the interest it expects to earn from these gold reserves would be used to keep these places clean, but that was not to be. It is rather a great irony that in a country where half of the population still lives a poverty-stricken life, religious institutions are 'filthy rich', making them power centres. Another note-worthy fact is that most of this money comes from the not-so-privileged class that is made to believe in the supremacy of their faith. The problem is more visible in the Hindu society with the Brahaminical order making sure that the caste divide remains visible enough. Perhaps, that's the reason cleanliness in a Hindu temple stops beyond the sanctum santorum. Can we change this? Perhaps yes.

Are the RSS volunteers listening?

■

Religion: Its Origin and Role

C G Shah

Ideologically, Religion is an error, an unscientific, untrue explanation of the phenomena and processes of the natural and social worlds. *Socially,* Religion has always been an instrument of bondage and oppression of the exploited classes by the exploiting ones. Religion, the buttress of social reaction, political, oppression and economic exploitation, has always been supported and strengthened, both physically and financially, by the ruling classes of the world, in all epochs and all lands.

But what is the genesis of all religious ideologies, of all metaphysical, mystical and other allied religious concepts? What are the historical conditions and roots these. unscientific ideologies, of all God-cults and Ghost-cults, of all subjective imaginings and metaphysical dreamings, of all religious and religio-ethical poisonings and emasculating of vast masses of mankind for ages leading to a retarding of the growth of all scientific human knowledge and of intensified class-slavery in the social world ? This is the fundamental problem in the study of all religions and religious ideologies and their *role* in the history of the social struggles of humanity across ages.

Ideas are the prod net of the material conditions in which man lives; so religious ideas evolved on the basis of certain specific social-material conditions in which humanity lived. What was the stage of social development, what were the social-material conditions in which mankind lived, when Religion and religious ideas sprouted in the mind of man? This tracing of the origin of religions ideas to its specific historical roots will not only help us to know the social causes which led to the evolution of religious ideas but will also enable us to lay down and predict certain social conditions when religious ideas will cease to sway the human mind, will decline, wither away and die. Such an analysis will reveal and make certain the social and transitory character of the origin and life of all Religions and Religious Ideologies. The supposed Immortal God and Everlasting Religion of all religious God-haunted people, when examined through the objective lens of scientific Marxist thought, turns out to be tinsel, monstrous momentary illusions which arose in the imagination of man at a certain stage of his social existence, and which will vanish at a definite social stage. God and Religion turn out not only to be transitory historical categories, rising at a certain stage of the historical development of the human race, rising as mis-reflections in the mind of man of the complex, multifold, multiform and ever transforming processes in the natural and social worlds and doomed to disappear when other social conditions arise.

But *what* were the specific social conditions which gave rise to religious psychology and ideology? And also what have been and will be the specific social circumstances which have undermined and will undermine and finally liquidate this psychology and ideology?

God and the whole complex of religious idea, attitudes and moods is the product of man's terror, ignorance of and helplessness before the forces of natural and social worlds (these weaknesses originating in technological weakness of man). Primitive savage humanity, ignorant of the laws of movement of its natural environs and of its own social organization, terror-stricken and mystified at the cataclysmic action of the devastating forces of Nature like

earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, this primitive savage humanity, by a process of psychological abstraction, abstracted and transformed its own qualities of weakness and ignorance into their opposites *i.e.* strength and knowledge, almightiness and omniscience and named it God. The God-concept, for the primitive savage humanity, was only a transformation into its opposite, the positive deified interpretation of man's own negative qualities of ignorance and terror, wonder and helplessness, regarding the colossal, un-mastered and undeciphered phenomena in the world around him and in which he lived.

Primitive humanity had not found out the material essence of the Universe, had not understood the developing nature of the world, and had not known the dialectical manner in which the whole world-historical process was developing. Primitive humanity had not attained an understanding of how astronomical evolution had brought planet earth into existence, how geological evolution on the planet earth at a certain stage had produced conditions like water, cooling of earth's temperature etc., when Life became possible and evolved. Primitive humanity did not know the history of life, how the whole process of evolution of life culminated finally in the birth of human species. Neither did primitive humanity understand what were the driving forces of all evolution, of evolution even of the collective social (herd) organization in which it then lived. The Natural Sciences viz. Astronomy, Physics, Chemistry, Biology etc., were still to be developed to offer a scientific understanding of the Universe. It was in the process of centuries of strenuous struggle for existence arid growth, against his natural environs that man accumulated scientific knowledge of the world as a means to understand, master and transform to its use that world.

So God-concept and Religious ideology were the product of man's ignorance of the natural and social worlds, of man's capitulation before the forces of these worlds, of man's unawareness of the laws governing the development of these worlds and therefore also man's own development. In absence of scientific understanding, the mind of man explained things regarding himself, his origin, the natural and social worlds which surrounded him and which he developed in a grotesque bizarre and uncanny way. Such was the origin of God-idea and all Religious ideologies in primitive society.

Having once originated and taken root in man's ignorance of the forces of Natural and Social worlds and of their laws of transformation, the God-concept and Religious ideology took different shapes in different periods of human existence. Different Religions, Religious Philosophies and concepts of God arose in different epochs on the basis of changes going on in the social structure of mankind. It is necessary to understand how in the process of material struggle for existence against Nature,-the contradiction between Nature and Man, he developed technological and scientific knowledge of the Natural World which along with his own labour-power constituted his material productive forces, how these productive forces determined the economic structure of human society as also the ideological life of man, how the condition of social-material forces in which mankind lived in a particular period determined the form of the ideology of the period including the form of God-concept and Religious Thought. Such an analysis will help us to understand not only why Religions ideas dominated man in particular periods but also why man was dominated in these periods only by particular religious ideas, why a specific concept of God or Gods, a specific Religion or Religious ideology prevailed in a particular historical epoch. As historical materialism teaches us, backward conditions of social existence gave birth to Religion and changes, in these conditions bring about changes in the concept of Religion.

Later, as a result of the development of productive forces of mankind of the increased knowledge of technique of means of production and of increased productive power, collectivist prehistoric tribal society was dissolved giving place to class-stratified society, slave society being generally the first form of such a society in different parts of the world. It is necessary and useful to understand why certain concepts of God and specific religions ideologies prevailed in the environs of a particular class society, why these concepts perished and were replaced by another set religious concepts when the change in the ever-developing productive forces of society brought about reorganization of society though invariably after revolutionary political explosion, and an armed struggle between classes on a different economic and on a different class relation basis. But the most significant and all important fact with which one is confronted while retrospecting the history of religions and religious ideologies in all their transformations, is the reactionary role they have invariably played.

In all class societies, slave, feudal or modern capitalist, Religion by its very nature has been the ideological weapon in the hands of the exploiting classes to 'opiate' the exploited classes. Religion has always been the 'handmaid' of the oppressing, exploiting, property owning, socially dominant class. Religion attempted to neutralize class struggle the fighting out of which to its finish can alone lead to the emancipation of the masses from the grip of exploitation. Religion, by preaching nebulous humanitarian ethics and by side-tracking attention to mythical Other Worlds, blinds the oppressed and exploited classes to the brutal fact of class struggle and class exploitation, and plants illusions of class-co-operation among them, thus weakening their growing will to smash the system of exploitation.

Further, in spite of the great advance of the Natural Sciences which have decisively exploded all religious explanations of the world exposing them as so many lies and errors, in spite of the scientific formulation, for the first time, of the laws of Social Evolution by Marx, the first scientific Sociologist in history, Religious ideas are still not liquidated among the people. There is a deep reason for this. The unplanned state of the economic life of mankind, the anarchy prevailing in the social world, the conscious attempts of the dominant class to perpetuate religious terror with a view to keep the masses stupefied and submissive to their rule and exploitation by all instruments at their disposal like the school, press, stage, cinema, radio, these are some of the principle causes why Religion still maintains its grip over the general mass of people.

(Courtesy: *Reason*; Dec 1931)

■

Homeopathy: Overdosing on Nothing

Martin Robbins

AT 10.23 am on 30 January, more than 300 activists in the UK, Canada, Australia and the US will take part in a mass homeopathic "overdose". Sceptics will publicly swallow an entire bottle of homeopathic pills to demonstrate to the public that homeopathic remedies, the product of a scientifically unfounded 18th-century ritual, are simply sugar pills.

Many of the sceptics will swallow 84 pills of arsenicum album, a homeopathic remedy based on arsenic which is used to treat a range of symptoms, including food poisoning and insomnia.

The aim of the "10:23" campaign, led by the Merseyside Skeptics Society, based in Liverpool, UK, is to raise public awareness of just exactly what homeopathy is, and to put pressure on the UK's leading pharmacist, Boots, to remove the remedies from sale.

The campaign is called 10:23 in honour of the Avogadro constant (approximately 6 × 1023, the number of atoms or molecules in one mole of a substance), of which more later.

That such a protest is even necessary in 2010 is remarkable, but somehow the homeopathic industry has not only survived into the 21st century, but prospered. In the UK alone more than £40 million is spent annually on homeopathic treatments, with £4 million of this being sucked from the National Health Service budget. Yet the basis for homeopathy defies the laws of physics, and high-quality clinical trials have never been able to demonstrate that it works beyond the placebo effect.
The discipline is based on three "laws"; the law of similars, the law of infinitesimals and the law of succession. The law of similars states that something which causes your symptoms will cure your symptoms, so that, for example, as caffeine keeps you awake, it can also be a cure for insomnia. Of course, that makes little sense, since drinking caffeine, well, keeps you awake.

Next is the law of infinitesimals, which claims that diluting a substance makes it more potent. Homeopaths start by diluting one volume of their remedy - arsenic oxide, in the case of arsenicum album - in 99 volumes of distilled water or alcohol to create a "centesimal". They then dilute one volume of the centesimal in 99 volumes of water or alcohol, and so on, up to 30 times. Application of Avogadro's constant tells you that a dose of such a "30C" recipe is vanishingly unlikely to contain even a single molecule of the active ingredient.

The third pillar of homeopathy is the law of succession. This states - and I'm not making this up - that by tapping the liquid in a special way during the dilution process, a memory of the active ingredient is somehow imprinted on it. This explains how water is able to carry a memory of arsenic oxide, but apparently not of the contents of your local sewer network.

The final preparation is generally dropped onto a sugar pill which the patient swallows.

Homeopaths claim that the application of these three laws results in a remedy that, even though it contains not a single molecule of the original ingredient, somehow carries an "energy signature" of it that nobody can measure or detect.

Unsurprisingly, when tested under rigorous scientific conditions, in randomised, controlled and double-blind trials, homeopathic remedies have consistently been shown to be no better than a placebo. Of course, the placebo effect is quite powerful, but it's a bit like justifying building a car without any wheels on the basis that you can still enjoy the comfy leather seats and play with the gear shift.

Even some retailers who sell the treatments have admitted there is no evidence that they work. In November, Paul Bennett, the superintendent pharmacist at Boots, appeared before the UK parliament's Commons Science and Technology Committee's "evidence check" on homeopathy. He was questioned by Member of Parliament Phil Willis, who asked: "Do they work beyond the placebo effect?"

"I have no evidence before me to suggest that they are efficacious," Bennett replied. He defended Boots's decision to sell homeopathic remedies on the grounds of consumer choice. "A large number of our consumers actually do believe they are efficacious, but they are licensed medicinal products and, therefore, we believe it is right to make them available," he said.

We believe there is a risk in perpetuating the idea that homeopathy is equivalent to modern medicine

You might agree. You might also argue that homeopathy is harmless: if people want to part with their money for sugar pills and nobody is breaking the law, why not let them? To some extent that's true - there's only so much damage you can do with sugar pills short of feeding them to a diabetic or dropping a large crate of them on someone's head.

However, we believe there is a risk in perpetuating the notion that homeopathy is equivalent to modern medicine. People may delay seeking appropriate treatment for themselves or their children.

We accept that we are unlikely to convince the true believers. Homeopathy has many ways to sidestep awkward questions, such as rejecting the validity of randomised controlled trials, or claiming that homeopathic remedies only work if you have symptoms of the malady they purport to cure. Our aim is to reach out to the general public with our simple message: "There is nothing in it".

Boots and other retailers are perfectly entitled to continue selling homeopathic remedies if they so wish and consumers are perfectly entitled to keep on buying them. But hopefully the 10:23 campaign will ram home our message to the public. In the 21st century, with decades of progress behind us, it is surreal that governments are prepared to spend millions of tax pounds on homeopathy. There really is nothing in it.

Courtesy: *New Scientist*

■

Stop funding Homeopathy,
say British MPs

Andy Coghlan

Homeopathic remedies work no better than placebos, and so should no longer be paid for by the UK National Health Service, a committee of British members of parliament has concluded. The House of Commons Science and Technology Committee, which released its report on homeopathy on Monday, also urges governments in other European countries where homeopathy is popular – notably Germany, France and Austria – to be equally wary of funding homeopathy. "We feel there's a real message, not just in the UK," says committee chairman and Liberal Democrat MP Phil Willis.

In preparing its report, the committee which scrutinises the evidence behind government policies, took evidence from scientists and homeopaths, and reviewed numerous reports and scientific investigations into homeopathy. It found no evidence that such treatments work beyond providing a placebo effect.

Placebo deception

"We conclude that placebos should not be routinely prescribed on the National Health Service," the report says. It also says homeopathic hospitals should not be funded by the NHS, and NHS doctors should not refer patients to homeopaths. Currently the NHS funds four homeopathic hospitals.

The committee also says that prescribing of placebos, which have an effect because a patient believes they will, involves a "degree of patient deception" and so is "not consistent with informed patient choice".

The committee is also critical of the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) and its practice of licensing homeopathic treatments. This gives the incorrect impression that the evidence of efficacy for homeopathic remedies is as strong as for conventional medicines, the report says.

The committee rejected the MHRA's justification for licensing homeopathic remedies – that there is an "important homeopathic tradition" to uphold. "Witchcraft is traditional, so does that mean the MHRA should endorse that too?" Willis asks.

Sugar pills

Homeopathic medicines are diluted so much that it is extremely unlikely that any active component can possibly be left in the solution. The committee failed to identify any plausible explanation for how such remedies might work.

The MPs' report also criticises the labelling on homeopathic products, which it says fails to inform the public that homeopathic products are "sugar pills containing no active ingredients".

The report draws attention to homeopathic remedies derived from body parts such as hip joints and colons, animals such as iguanas and dragonflies, and even products exposed to different kinds of sunlight. In the case of remedies derived from fragments of archaeological

monuments such as the Great Wall of China and Stonehenge, they point out that it is hard to understand how even homeopathy's own principle of "like cures like" could apply.

Unknown costs

The MPs say there seems to be no reliable record of how much the NHS spends on homeopathic treatments. While Mike O'Brien, the minister responsible for the NHS, told the committee that the NHS spends £150,000 a year on homeopathic remedies, the UK-based Society of

Homeopaths said that the NHS spends £4 million annually. This does not include the running costs of the homeopathic hospitals and the £20 million spent on refurbishing the Royal London Homoeopathic Hospital between 2002 and 2005.

Edzard Ernst of the Peninsula Medical School in Exeter, Devon, UK, a long-standing critic of homeopathic medicine, says the MPs' report should be noted in other countries where homeopathy is widely practised but not subjected to serious critical scrutiny. "The evidence is negative, and it's internationally negative, because there's no difference between countries in terms of evidence," he says.

In a dig at the Prince of Wales, who is an ardent supporter of homeopathic medicine in the UK, Ernst says: "Either we are governed by evidence and science, or by Prince Charles." The Prince's Foundation for Integrated Health, which backs complementary therapies, including homeopathy, acknowledges that homeopathy is "scientifically implausible", but defends the use of such remedies nonetheless.

"For patients suffering from long term disease, where no scientific, evidence based medicine can offer effective treatment, it does not matter how it works," says the foundation, in a response to the committee's report. "What matters to them is whether they get better, whether pain and other symptoms are alleviated."

Michael Dixon, medical director of the foundation adds: "Science is a vital tool in healthcare, but so are compassion and caring and treating patients with dignity. It is not clear that the Committee took that into account."

Courtesy: *New Scientist*

■

How I became an Agnostic?

Keshava Shet Revankar

Recent Blogs in web-site "*Nirmukta*" by Dr. Prabhakar Kamath of US should create ripples of skepticism in the minds of the educated youth. Therefore it should be the endeavour of all Rationalists to augment these ripples into waves of thoughts to raise the level of consciousness of the youth, as it is next to impossible to chip away the calcified layers of obscurantism from the brains of Hindu elite & masses. As I am not a scholar on any scriptures I can only recount my experiences and random thoughts on Hinduism.

We have heard a million times the sciptural Quote "*Tamaso Ma Jyothirgamaya* "(Lead us from darkness to light), from all types of people. But the "Priest Craft" of Hinduism has succeeded brilliantly to keep the whole society in darkness, through centuries of indoctrination. During last 5-6 decades they have succeeded to make Article 51 (h), 41(A).... null and void. State failed constitution of India, to make every citizen develop spirit of inquiry and scientific temper, and society failed the Rational teaching of their Holy-Book. We are witnessing in recent decades, that the society is plunged in a frenzy of religiosity with new viruses like *vaastu* etc attacking their brains. Dr. Kamath, a practicing psychiatrist in US has clinically analysed the Hindu-psyche and diagnosed it as "Obsessive-Compulsive-Disorder"(OCD). We require thousands of Dr Kamaths to treat the whole society. Meera Nanda a scholar from US has narrated in detail in her book *God Market* about how the God-Market is run by "State-- Temple_-- Corporate -- Complex". which is exactly the same as " Kshatriya--Brahmin-- Bania-- Nexus. "

As for me the seeds of skepticism germinated within me during my high school days after reading the novels by a rationalist Dr. Shivarama Karanth. After observing the behaviour of '*Vipras*' who are wearing holy-thread, I discarded my own at a later age. Then I felt free from the fetters of obscurantism. Many years later, a strange incident snapped my faith in Temples and Deities. During evening walk I used to step into a temple and mechanically take a couple of rounds and accept the spoonful of water (*thirtha*) from the priest. One day an outside party had paid for a special *pooja* for his prosperity of course. The completion of pooja coincided with my taking the rounds and as usual I stretched my hand for' *thirtha*'. The priest too mechanically was about to pour out the spoonful water, but then realised that I did not belong to that party. He suddenly withdrew, because I should not take a share of the pooja meant for that party. I too turned back, came out of the temple and never to enter a temple again.

Same night I was deeply thinking about the mean mindedness of the priest over just a spoonful of water and my own stupidity of taking rounds inside the temple. A flash of intuition brought to my mind the behaviour of MOTHS. They were a nuisance after nightfall, going round and round the lights and fall dead in hundreds in the morning. When other lights are switched on half of them rush towards those lights. In some places if a pail of water is kept below, they rush towards the reflection of the light and get drowned. No one knew the reason for this behavior then, until Richard Dawkins gave the answer in his Book-*'God-Delusion'*. He explains that night-lights on view till recently were moon and stars. They are at optical infinity, of rays from them are parallel insects are known to use celestial objects to steer accurately in straight line, and they use this compass, with reversed sign for returning home after foray. Their nervous system has adopted to steer a course such that light rays hit the eye at an angle of 30 degrees. As the artificial lights are not at optical infinity, the moths steering at that angle steer in a spiral trajectory in to the candle flame or lamps. Hindus too

exhibit the same behavior of going in circles around deities. f a rich man kills millions of birds to produce export quality broilers, become fabulously rich and builds a replica of a famous Temple of the south people rush to that temple just like moths rushing to the reflection of the light

Buddhism gave an orientation to Indian society to establish a caste-less, egalitarian and altruistically co-operative society. The eight-fold path is for the whole humanity to be totally secular without the concepts of God or soul. Buddha preached all his life to erect two pillars of *prajna* and *karunya* (*prajna* is awareness which means information, scientific temper and *karunya* is compassion). These two pillars were demolished by *Vaidic Purohits* and erected, in their place, their pillars of *Chatur Varna* and *Karma-Kanda.* These two pillars of evil have enslaved *shudras* for generations after generations after generations. This made the rulers' job easy and provided a life of ease and comfort for higher castes.

Chatur-Varna created hundreds of closed systems (Castes) which went on losing energy (2nd law of thermodynamics), as they were deprived of their social and economic legitimacy. Over such a long period of 3000 years social-entropy increased to cause perpetual and abysmal poverty, as we are witnessing now. To support this system *Shankaraacharya* set up four Mutts not to propagate his *Adwaita* but as watch towers, to nip in the bud, any attempt to revive Buddhism.

Besides the high rate of increase of social and economic-entropy of lower castes, mental-entropy of higher castes also increased because of this pernicious caste system. Each caste (closed system) became stereotyped due to lack of interaction and cultural assimilation over centuries and they can not come out of the frame of the stereotyped mind. Thus they remained disgustingly mediocre, except being ruthless in area of making money. That's why we see today such a large crowd of mediocre politicians and bureaucrats who have amassed wealth through rampant corruption. Their only attempt to enter sphere of *brahminic- elitism* is by copying silly rituals like *Gana-Homa*, and *Satyanarayana pooja* at every opportunity and rushing to astrologers for any flimsy reason, avoiding, of course, *Rahu-Kalam*. State, intelligentsia and so called intellectuals should be ashamed of themselves for being passive on-lookers of such onslaught of mediocrity. This new disorientation has made Hindus mortgage their brains to 'Purohits, astrologers, and new-age frauds called 'God-Men'.

Hinduism is a sexed-up polytheism and a huge subterfuge for self glorification of the *kshatriyas* and *vaidic brahmins*. Tribal deities, family deities of clans, vassals, feudal lords and mythological characters were cobbled up into a hierarchy of Gods; each group squandered their wealth for building hundreds of temples for their own deities as status symbols. Temples were made attractive with hard-porn in stone in almost all of them. Khajurao is the magnum-opus. *Kamasutra* by Vatsayana titillated the sense-buds of rulers and aristocracy. Luxurious -ceremonies were invented in temples. All this started by 2nd -3rd century, during Gupta Period. Here-After, by this hedonistic life-style *kshatriyas* lost their valour. This made it easy after another 3-4 centuries, for Turks and later Moghuls come in and establish their rule without much resistance.

Regarding the now prevalent 'State-Temple- Corporate-Complex" (Ref: *God-Market* by Meera Nanda) let me give one example. Mr. NR Narayan Murthy, highly respected in the corporate world, writes in his Book *A better India, A better world* -- 'I am a Brahmin and I am minority'. He should know that this three per cent minority perpetrated so much misery on the lower castes. In no other civilization so few have caused so much misery on such a large

mass of humanity over such a long period. In another lecture he drops a hint 'I was on my way from B'lore to Mantralaya'. Rational thinkers know that these *Samadhis* of some ascetics are nothing but glorified versions of primitive tribals' corpse worship. Actually IT Corporate Heads should visit Alan Turing's tomb stone if they could locate it in UK. It was he who advanced the notion of universal computer. These celebrities advertise temples, Mutts, God-men as though Gods have a purpose to make only them rich and famous.

Grant Allen in his book *The evolution of the Idea of God*, (published a hundred years back) writes "Thus the cult of the dead is the earliest origin of all religions. In one word- that corpse worship is the protoplasm of religion, while admitting that folk-lore is the protoplasm of mythology, and it's modern and philosophical off shoot-- Theology".

■

Delhi Corporates Walk On Fire to Beat the Blues

Fire-walking is drawing thousands of stressed corporate employees, students and householders as a way to beat meltdown and lifestyle blues. The latest urban stress reliever involves walking barefoot over a bed of hot embers or stones and is used as a modern motivational tool. Usually, a combination of pine, ash and coal is burnt and crushed to a smooth red hot path of embers. The lane is 15- 20 feet long and 2-3 feet wide. The temperature initially soars to over 650 degrees Celsius but is then brought down to 425 degrees before anyone is allowed to walk on it.

The modem concept of fire - walking is based on the principle that the perception of life and that of the world changes through the act of conquering and confronting your fear. Walking on fire eases stress and inspires self-confidence:' P S Rathode, aneuro-linguistic programming (NLP) trainer and a leading fire-walk therapist, said.
Fire-walking is an ancient therapy known to have been practised by the early Orthodox Christians in Greece during the festival of Saint Constantine and St Helen, History also cites evidence of Hindu seers of the later Vedic age, Buddhists and Muslim fakirs walking on fire - a rite which is still in vogue today across Asia and old settlements of Europe, the therapist said.

The act of fire-walking, said Rathode, involved 'two basic mental exercises.
First, concentrate on your inner power and then take the decision to accept the the challenge. One must walk on the burning fire barefoot without a break. However, motivation from a trainer helps," he said. Rathode has trained under motivation masters Richard Bandler and John Grinder of US. H has conducted several training programmes for Delhi Police, Indian Air Force, Ministry of Finance and private firms. He will conduct a day-long seminar here in February.

The trainer said fire-walking is part of traditional Indian alternative medicine. "Fire worship and fire-walking have nourished the human spirit since the beginning of civilisation. Many tribal groups in the country have rituals involving the sacred fire" he said.

■

An Official Journal of Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samitee, India

THOUGHT & ACTION

Committed to Build Rationalist Society

Issue 2 Jul- Sept 2010 Vol. 10

In this Issue ....

2 **Some Historical Polls in Bogus Science**
John Grant

4 **The Rationalist in Difficulties**
D D Karve

6 **From Darkness to Light**
Dr Narendra Dabholkar

11 **Rationalist in Action**
Prabhakar Nanawaty

15 **Religious Excitement across Pakistan**
Pervez Hoodbhoy

18 **Yogification of America**
Whitney Joiner

21 **Guinness Record for Social Cause**
Supriya Shelar

22 **Martin Gardner (1914 – 2010)**
Michael Shermer

32 **Born Believers**
Michael Brooks

Foundeer
Dr. Narendra Dabholkar

Editors
PK Nanawaty
TB Khilare
Ms Suman Oak

email: pkn.ans@gmail.com

www.thoughtnaction.co.in

Some Historical Polls in Bogus Science

John Grant

When Columbia University students were polled in 1920 just 2% believed there was anything in palmistry and just 4% believed in astrology, but about 10% credited phrenology, avoided the number 13, and thought you could make someone turn to look at you if you stared hard enough at their back (not necessarily the same 10% in all three cases).

By the 1950s in the UK, 20% credited astrology, 17% believed in ghosts (and about 7% believed they'd seen one), and over 15% swore by such superstitions as lucky numbers and mascots. In Germany at roughly the same time, about one third of the people believed in astrology while the levels of superstitions were substantially higher than the UK equivalents. In a 1977 a Roper survey in the US, belief in astrology ran at 25%, ESP 53%, Heaven and Hell 74%, UFOs as alien artifacts 29%, and reincarnation 14% — this last figure was down from a 1969 survey which had shown belief in reincarnation at 20%. Another US survey the following year put belief in ghosts and witches at about 10%, angels at 54%, flying saucers at 57% and the Devil at 37%, with credence given to astrology by nearly 50% and to precognition over one-third. By 1981 the belief in reincarnation risen to 23%.

According to a 1987 report in Time, whereas only one-half US population had believed in psychic phenomena in 1974, now (i.e., in 1987) the figure was more like two thirds. Of those surveyed, 15% claimed to have seen a flying saucer, 62% believed in the Devil (although 'only' 54% in demonic possession) and 25% believed in astrology. In 1993, 69% believed in angels and 49% in devils. Belief in ESP ran at 46%, in clairvoyance at 22%, and in communication with the spirits of the dead at 14%.

Even in the 21st century, only about l0 % of US adults know what radiation is, about 30% know that DNA is the key heredity, almost nobody outside scientists knows what a molecule is, and an astonishing 20% think the sun goes round the earth. And 40% of US scientists think they can communicate directly with God. A US survey done by Gallup in 2009 to mark the 200th anniversary of Charles Darwin's birth revealed that a full 25% of Americans rejected evolution outright, an extraordinary 36% thought the matter was still open to debate and "don't have an opinion either way", while only 39% accept the reality. Meanwhile, a UK survey published in 2009 showed how much more credulous the Brits have grown since the 1950s: 39% believe in ghosts, 22% in astrology, 27% in reincarnation, 53% in life after and 55% in Heaven. (The 2 % difference in the latter puzzling: presumably a few people think we don't survive death but might go to Heaven anyway).

These figures do not paint a progressively more educated society. It's difficult to regard them as anything than a massive failure in our public education, which in itself reflects a massive failure of responsibility by our politicians and media. But they also represent a failure by us because each of us individually is almost certainly not doing enough to beat back the flood of bogus science. And there is probably not one of us who hasn't on occasion been fooled by it.

According to the paper "Learning of Content knowledge and Scientific Reasoning Ability: A Cross cultural Comparison" by Lei Bao et al, published in Science in January 2009, which compared US college scientific and engineering freshmen with their Chinese counterparts, the

ability to reason scientifically is *at a* low ebb in *both* cultures, with *the* US students being significantly *more* ignorant than the Chinese ones about matters scientific.

Both groups did poorly in the test of basic knowledge about electricity and magnetism, but the difference in quality of school science education between the two countries is dramatically reflected in the average score of the two groups for this test: the Chinese averaged just under 66%, the US students just under 27%. (As the paper's lead author, Lei Ban of the Physics education Research Group at Ohio State University, pointed out, the US students' average of 27% is not too significantly above the score that could have been achieved by chance in this test, 20%.) In the test of knowledge of mechanics, both groups did better, but the contrast between average scores was still major: 86% for the Chinese and 49% for the Americans.

Yet in their ability to reason scientifically, as indicated by the Lawson Classroom Test (A patented scheme whereby students are presented with scientific hypotheses and asked to evaluate them using deductive reasoning), the average scores for the two groups represented a statistical dead heat: Just under 75% for the Chinese and about 74% for the Americans. Before the latter think of getting cocky, though, it should be noted that 75% is regarded as a fairly poor score in this particular test.

The counterintuitive subtext here is that mere knowledge of scientific facts does not much affect the ability to reason logically. Or maybe it's not so counterintuitive after all: as a few voices in the wilderness have been saving for decades now, a major flaw in almost all modern education systems is that they assume the *ability to think* is somehow inherited or is a natural property of the human brain, rather than something that needs to be learned - and taught. In other words, we're not really equipping our young with the ability to recognize *why* the bogus scientific claims presented to them from all directions in our society are indeed bogus; we're just *telling* them those claims are bogus because they "disobey the rules"- never the best way to encourage people, especially young people, to avoid something!

Courtesy*: Bogus Science*

●●●

Humankind

I offer, to those who want it, a religious humanism that is human- centered; not god-centered. In this view our lives have meaning, but it is meaning that we and our communities give them, not meaning that is derived from a supernatural source. We have to act as if we have free will because we can do nothing else. But we and our communities have to have to develop our own ethics. There are no moral imperatives and no universal code of morality, no automatic rewards for good deeds, no automatic punishments for bad deeds, no God looking over our shoulders. All we can do is strive to improve ourselves and our world; and we are completely on our own. .... The power to improve the system further and to extend our good fortune to the rest of the world is in us and our own rational thinking, not in God.

Matt Young

Rationalist in Difficulties

D D Karve

One of the usual arguments of those who advocate the existence, not only of a god, but of one endowed with the qualities of kindness and goodness, is that such a conviction is bound to serve as a consolation to a large number of people when great calamities attack them and threaten their very existence. Let us examine this position a little more closely.

When difficulties make the path of life not so smooth as before, when the fun and joy of living seems entirely remote, different ways are found of consoling oneself. There a type of people who is prone to say—"well, the ways of the Almighty are unknowable and what is my misery now may possibly be for my ultimate good. I must, therefore, resign myself to his will and suffer my pain in silence." Of course, if the sufferer is really honest in his conviction that what happens *(*or, in his words, what God orders.) is always for the ultimate good, he may probably feel some relief from the sorrow. Whether this kind of conviction IS based on any reasonable grounds is an entirely different question, For, after all, "ultimate good "is a term that will have no end. The destruction of an individual may be good for a family, that of a family for a village or even of a whole province" for the world. That the very arrangement of things by which the misery of one should mean the happiness of another, cannot be the work of a merciful god, is a point of view, which is probably beyond the comprehension of a blind believer in God's mercy. However, granting that a person has the honest conviction about the ultimate goodness of all God's actions (i.e. of all happenings in the universe), he can find a sort of consolation in every difficultly. It must, however, be admitted, that it is based on ignorance.

There is, however, also a more rationalistic way of achieving the same object. If we trace the history of the universe*,* or even of this little earth from geological times to the present day, the causal development of all natural phenomena will become evident. The succeeding events in the history of the world, the evolution of life, its manifestation in various forms, the appearance and disappearance of new species, the treatment meted out by one species to another, the behaviour of human races and other small groups to each other, the effect of forces of nature and of other forms of life on human beings, all show us clearly that they form an unbroken chain of cause and effect, without any ultimate object or goal which can be deduced from the phenomena themselves. In other words, the world is not teleological but only casual in its development. The happenings, either in the material or the animal world, can therefore be assigned values only in so far as they affect us human beings. And even then, these values will be entirely relative to the particular standpoint of the person who assigns them. The death of a soldier during the war must have been looked upon as a great calamity by the members of his family, but probably as a good thing by his enemies, who in fact must have been instrumental in bringing about that event. To the thinking man, it is thus clear that events in space and time are happening because of causes that have taken place, and that these events in their turn become the causes of other events to follow. It is this unbroken chain, the beginning and end of which neither philosopher nor scientist has been able to unravel, which confronts us in our every-day life. Events are neither good nor bad by themselves, they can be so only in relation to a person or persons whom they affect (The same applies to other conceptions of values. In a recent discussion on the obscenity or otherwise of a certain book, a statement to the effect, that obscenity cannot attach to a thing or word, *per se,* but can only exist in the mind of the observer or reader as the case may be, was strongly objected to by a writer of the orthodox school. It is quite clear that a thing or a printed

word, in the absence of any living being near about can have no conception of value attached to it.) If then nature is obviously aimless and is neither good nor bad, the best way to console oneself in difficulties is not to rely upon the imaginary ultimate mercifulness of a problematical god but to resign oneself to the inevitableness of the same and to take the help of our fellow humans in order to prevent, if possible, similar occurrences in future. I would then say to myself "it is a great pity that calamity has taken place; I mast try to forget it as soon as possible, get out of it, with the help of others, if necessary, and again take up my work as a useful unit in this human fraternity of mine. There is no divine help I can expect; everything that takes place is doing so without any reference to my feelings. Natural laws are neither good nor bad. They are simply there and I have got to d just myself accordingly." -That is the rational way to face difficulties.

Courtesy: *Reason,* Aug 1934

●●●

Deccan Chronicle published a collection of 2-liners
Which sums you know who!

Discourse by day *Intercourse by night*

Healing the masses by day *Feeling the masses by night*

Sandal wood by day *Tiger Woods by night*

Missionary by day *'Missionary' by night*

Spiritual by day *Spirited by night*

Pujari by day *Tiwari (ND) by night*

Baba by day *Black sheep by night*

Bead-ing by day *Bedding by night*

Swamy by day *Slimy by night*

Renounce by day *Pounce by night*

Lecture by day *Lecher by night*

Din mei jogi *Raat mei bhogi*

Nityananda by day *'Nityananga' by night*

What a charmed life!

From Darkness to Light

Dr Narendra Dabholkar

I must have authored about a dozen books on different aspects of the movement 'Eradication of Superstition' by now. I am also fortunate enough to have received a large audience calling for publication of several editions of each book, at times over even a dozen; I wrote on this subject in the newspapers and gave thousands of speeches on it. All that I want to point out here through all these details is that I have been speaking and working to eradicate superstition to engender Scientific Outlook and propagate rationalism- for the last 25 years and yet I felt obliged to write this book. I must explain why.

As I progressed through discussions, movements, thinking and deliberations on this subject my comprehension of it ripened. I became aware that an orderly exposition of this subject has not so far been attempted by my predecessors. Many social reformers have written on various aspects of it which were more often topical, related to issues of their time. In one or two books of mine, already published, I did attempt such an organized, logical exposition; but it seems quite inadequate to day. The movement of eradication of superstition has many aspects and many dimensions. And with all humility, I think that no other movement as multidimensional and multifaceted as the movement of 'Eradication of Superstition' exists in Maharashtra or even anywhere else in the country. One of the obstacles that the students and workers of this movement have to face is the absence of a logical and properly organized exposition on it. This book attempts to remove that obstacle. It will naturally repeat some arguments from my previous writings but it will, I hope, offer the reader a proper comprehensive and philosophical perspective of the subject.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part is directly related to issues regarding 'Eradication of Superstition'. The second part is about all the vigorous struggles that the 'Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti' (ANS) has to carry out. They give a strong basis of actual work to the theoretical reasoning. Far too many struggles regarding various aspects of the movement have been waged but only a few could be mentioned here because of the limitation on the number of pages in a book. Again, since I am the author of the book, issues related to me have found a place in this part. Even this list is long enough; therefore only one or two incidents from each area are narrated. When read together they give an idea of the vastness of the movement. The third part pertains to the theoretical basis of the movement. It deals with all the matters regarding 'Andhashraddha Nirmoolan' that are constantly discussed.

Accordingly, the first part contains a comprehensive discourse on Scientific Outlook, Astrology Tested Scientifically, Ancient Architecture of the Scriptures-a Blind Faith, Pseudoscience, Mind and Mental Illness, Being Possessed by Ghost, Possessed by a Deity, Hypnotism, Bhanamati and God men. Also discussed is the issue often raised 'does ANS eradicate superstitions of the Hindus only.'

In the second part you will find the Story of Sahibjadi, Miracle of Karam Ali Darvesh, Miracle of Langar, God Baba (the sweet god man) and Daivi Upachar of Kushira (treatment by religious rites). It narrates the humiliation of a Mantrik who boasted of being able to show a ghost. ANS challenges every miracle whenever and wherever it is claimed. Three different issues handled by

the Samiti will enable the reader to understand all aspects of this problem. These three stories are-

- The process of exposing the miracle claimed to be performed in the temple of the so-called 'Jagrit' deity, (the deity in the full exercise of its divinity) in the Sidhudurga district;

- Confronting Narendra Maharaj in his own monastery at Nanij and exposing all his miracles through a blunt one on one debate;

- On 21st September 1995, all of a sudden the idols of Ganesh started drinking milk all over the country and even abroad. This is the story of how this fraud was exposed. Then there is a letter written to the Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Shri Vilasrao Deshmukh, a Satya Sai Baba devotee, informing him why I do not wish to accept the Award for the Best Publisher at his hands.

Mental illness is of two types. One is to indulge in what is called Bhanamati causing nuisance. The Big Bhanamati of a small girl is an interesting and elucidating tale. Considering oneself to be the incarnation of the Queen of Zashi is an example of the second type- a serious case of disorder of the mind and shows the relation between mental disorder and mental illness. To fight 'Fatalism', a programme called –'Incineration of Fatalism'- was arranged. ANS workers set on fire their own Horoscopes. A movement conducted to oppose the introduction of Astrology as a subject of study in the curriculum at the University level is mentioned in this part. Similarly there is an account of how ANS exposed the latest fad called 'Vastushastra'. This will give a new insight to the reader. Critique of religion is the real test of efficacy of the movement like the ANS. At Shani Shinganapur women are not allowed to climb the platform where the deity is located even today. When ANS offered Satyagraha against this ban, there was a huge commotion. This reveals how sensitive the field wherein ANS works is.

Existence of god is a much argued topic with the rationalist movements. Some rationalists maintain that eradication of superstitions is not possible unless the concept of god is refuted. ANS adopts a different stand in this connection. Lively debates on 'awakening the faculty of discernment –Vivek Jagar'- are often held and are an important part of the ANS' action plan. ANS' plan of action has two more dimensions. There are a few organizations that are bent on obstructing the work of ANS on some pretext or other. The 'Sanatan Bharateeya Sanstha' has launched 14 personal lawsuits against me. This is described in somewhat details to reveal what a person conducting a movement like ANS has to go through. There are other organizations that hold a contrary view. They call themselves friends of the movement at conceptual level and accuse it for not criticizing Brahmanical rites and rituals or Brahmin godmen. The reason for this as assumed by them is that I, Narendra Dobholkar, the leader of ANS is a Brahmin. And the work that ANS does is in fact a part of a Brahminacal plot to deceive the gullible common people at large. This accusation is made time and again. I have put before the readers the plain facts in connection of this accusation. All this cogitation provides a concrete basis of positive action to our theoretical position and is put before the people explicitly. Actions are supported by the organization and the overall evaluation of the whole organization decides how important the thought process is. The building up of the Maharashtra ANS is peculiar in many ways. The passage, 'What is the Source of All This' takes note of these peculiar qualities.

The third part is theoretical proposition. It is expected to be thought provoking. Rationalists have indulged in endless scholarly discussions on issues like god, religion, spirituality, secularism, etc. all over the world that involves plenty of heterodoxy. Here I attempt to express the thought that developed out of the experience I gathered from the movement and out my own reflection. I do not claim this to be the official manifesto of ANS. All that I maintain is that members of the ANS working committee are weighing it up. This much I can claim because I have already written on some of the topics, dealt with here, in the annual issue of 'Varta Patra', the ANS monthly magazine; and most of the ANS activists seem to agree with my position. The discussion on how to comprehend the concept of god and how to evaluate the role played by religion in the Human History, to my mind, moves ANS forward. The same can be said about my exposition on 'Faith, Superstition' and 'Cognizing Spirituality'. The topic 'Social Reformers of Maharashtra' is vast. I. therefore, chose to speak here only on that aspect of the work of the major social reformers that deals with Rationalism and Eradication of Superstition. These social Reformers of Maharashtra have opined on issues as diverse as from education to agriculture and from governance to Technology. It has even affected, to some extent, the psyche of Maharashtra. But the Maharashtrian society, wittingly or unwittingly, remained apathetic to the sane thoughts of these great men on Rationalism and Eradication of Superstition. I have made an attempt to present these thoughts coherently and in a logical order in the chapter, 'The Social Reformers of Maharashtra and Eradication of Superstition'. I humbly request the readers to critically examine my thoughts on 'Secularism'. There exists a traditional line of thought on 'how to engender secularism in India'. I mean to point out here that these reformers investigated religion constructively so as to create a better, healthier society. The interpretation of religion that most of these social reformers presented was but 'Vivek Jagar'-awakening of the faculty of discernment. Can this Constructive Religiosity provide a footing for propagation of Secularism? In my opinion the society should be engaged in a positive dialogue on this question. We in the ANS and myself are not much interested in verbal discourses on rationalism. What we really want is to see whether we can, by sharpening our own reasoning and intensifying our own morality, intervene in order to produce some benefit to the society.

For this book I am indebted to many writers. Some of the major writers from whom I benefitted are Tarkateerh Lakshman Shastri Joshi, G.B. Saradar, M.P. Rege, D.K. Bedekar, D.D. Bandiste, Subodh Javadekar, S.M.Garge, A.H. Salunkhye, Raosaheb Kasbe, and Yashvant Suman. There are many who are not mentioned. I am indebted to all of them and ever remain grateful to them. Any shortcomings or flaws that may be detected are mine.

I will end this prologue with a short note on the present status of eradication of superstition. When the movement was initiated, its work was looked upon as an activity against Buvabaji (god men), Ghosts, Bhanamati, sorcery, etc. which although complementary to the Reform movement was still only a minor action group. During the last 20 years, however, it has progressed through Eradication of Superstitions, Scientific way of thinking, Scientific Outlook, Critique of Religion, Secularism and Rationalism and is now definitely heading towards becoming the main component of the Reform Movement. Even at the stage of Rationalism we are keenly aware of two important concerns. Firstly the ANS respects those who want to be moral with the help of god and religion. ANS however wants to maintain its moral rectitude solely depending on its own conscience. Secondly ANS believes that it is necessary to intervene effectively but peacefully and democratically, in the social life of people by organizing their reasoning capacity; we ought to create a world better than it is today. This is utterly necessary and also achievable. This is the mission of the Rationalist Movements of the day.

To make individuals rational and to progress towards a rationalist society is the goal of the ANS. Although its main area of work is eradication of superstition, the Samiti looks at it as only the beginning of a constructive dialogue aimed at a rational reform of values. In this regard we are always challenged with a question that needs to be discussed here.

Information-knowledge-scientific thinking is the basic chain of edification. In this age of Inter net, there is no dearth of information. From the ocean of information, one has to think and choose what is useful or necessary for him; e.g. any amount of information is available on Health. But one has to sift and decide what diet, exercise, etc. suits him. You cannot use this knowledge unless you also use the Scientific Method. There are varied diets and exercises and deciding which ones are appropriate for you is nothing but the scientific method of thinking; for, you examine the pros and cons of all types of diets and exercises before you zero in on any of them. In the present educated society, individuals progress effortlessly up to this stage. While putting knowledge regarding diet, exercise, health or any technical skill to use, the basic chain of edification, information-knowledge-scientific thinking is invariably used. But in the next stage of achieving success or gratification, the scientific method of thinking is given a go by and the traditional thinking takes its place. For success, one has to work scientifically; but along whit this all the prescribed traditional means – Japajapya (repeating lord's name thousands of times), fire sacrifice, amulets and talismans, poojas, yadnyas, charmed threads and lockets, fasts and whatnot are quite religiously and meticulously observed. To be precise the scientific method of thinking is practiced for success in mundane day to day business; but at the same time the Scientific Outlook is entirely passed over. There is some fundamental difference between the scientific method of thinking and scientific outlook which is overlooked. The scientific method consists of observation, reasoning, inference, mathematical corroboration and experiment. Inquiry (or search of truth), as a value, is limited to these aspects. The pervasive 'Outlook on Life' created by Scientific Outlook is not implied in the scientific method of thinking. So those who adopt scientific method of thinking (but not the Scientific Outlook) merrily practice all sorts of superstitions; they don't feel there is anything wrong in it. Scientific method of thinking is mathematical thinking, precise and calculated. Scientific Outlook goes one step further; it is value oriented. It is a big leap forward. The scientific method of thinking i.e. observation- logic-inference-experiment- aims only at finding something. Curiosity is the sole value involved in this activity and in order to achieve its goal, it need not shy away from the 'reality of traditional orthodoxy'. For Scientific Outlook curiosity is essential; but along with curiosity other values, viz., correctness (not political), fearlessness, creativity and moral rectitude too are essential A person with scientific outlook has a distinct outlook on life. His research (curiosity) is not misdirected but appropriate. He is certain that the success or failure of his work does not depend on any good or bad external power. He is thoroughly convinced that the universe exists by itself. This proper attitude makes him fearless and free of fatalism and helplessness. The fearlessness makes him creative or innovative. Scientific Outlook being the same as the human conscience, a person with scientific attitude is much more likely to be moral than one without it because he understands well the cause-effect relation of human behavior, viz., 'I should not do unto others what I don't want to be done unto me and I should do unto others as I want them to do unto me.' This is the basis of his morality. However, since for the rationalist creating a moral society is of uppermost importance, he respects even that person who happens to be moral because of his belief in god and religion.

There is a reason for making a mention of this theme in the prologue although it is elaborated at length in the book. And that is because the question -'how even an educated student of science becomes a victim of superstition'- is raised time and again. The answer to this question is that when the scientific method of thinking is made use of only in self-interest or for fulfillment of academic requirements, the individual invariably regresses towards orthodoxy. And this is not unnatural, for, he has been under the influence of orthodoxy for more than thousand years. His thinking is founded in religion. His behavior is molded by the social environment and conforms to norms of the society. The mental enslavement caused by all these influences is very dangerous. The political or economic enslavement is easily recognized because of the exploitation caused by them. People can be awakened and moved to fight against it. Mental enslavement on the contrary is very convenient for the enslaved who feels comforted in it. Not only does he support and preserve the enslavement but he also organizes, promotes and exalts it. Fighting this enslavement thus becomes very difficult. Awakening people is not enough in this struggle; it needs engendering independent and right thinking, fearless mind and resolute action. More than anything else is the necessity of being ethical.

I will be gratified if the reader feels encouraged to progress a step further on reading this book

(*Preface to his forthcoming English book* From Darkness to Light)

●●●

Religious Belief

Why do people believe in religious doctrines, i.e. why do they accept the tenets of a religion and participate in its practices and rituals? Conversely we may ask, why do some people disbelieve in the tenets of religion and/or reject its practices? Religion is one of the most pervasive and enduring characteristics of human culture. Predictions by scientists and rationalists at the end of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that religion would eventually disappear surely were premature because by the end of twentieth century it remained as strong as ever. Why do people believe in the religious claims? Is it because they have not been exposed to criticisms? Most of the classical religious beliefs emerged in a pre-scientific era before the application of the method of science. .. It is often difficult to engage impartial scholarly or scientific inquiry into the origins of religious doctrines, particularly when those critically examining the foundations of the revered truths are often placed in jeopardy by their societies.

Paul Kurtz

Rationalist in Action

Prabhakar Nanawaty

It is generally presumed that most of the rationalists are easy chair philosophers who never bother about what is happening in and around their surroundings. But this may not be true. There are many rationalists in present day India who are confronting the superstitious elements in the society and while doing so, are being harassed for their noble deed. Amongst such rationalists who are actively participating in the movement and agitations against superstitions and godmen claiming supernatural powers, Prof Narendra Nayak appears to be a star performer. Almost for last three decades he is striving hard to imbibe scientific temper in the society by involving himself in the rationalist movement and contributing articles and letters to various periodicals and daily news papers describing his views and happenings in the field of rationalism. His book "Battle against Supernatural" is a compilation of such articles, and letters written by him while confronting the superstitions prevailing in the society.

Barring a few, each and every page in this book is an eye opener to the activists working in this area. Author's multifaceted activities, his involvement in confronting the godmen in spite of risks involved, his strong views on the strategies to be adapted to progress rationalist movement further will be highly appreciated as one turns the pages. In fact he had many things to say and would have elaborated further on the issues involved. As such most of the articles are very short (and precise) due to the limitations imposed by the print media and responses given by the media at that juncture. He might have been forced to cut short what he wanted to say. The writings included in this book have been written during the period 1988 to 2006. The writings contain aspects like Satya Sai Baba (Aka Satya Narayan Raju as author wants to address him!) Mata Amritanand Mayi (Aka Sudhamani!), Benny Hill, an evangelist, Art of Living fame Sri Sri (!) Ravishankar, Kalki Bhagwan cult, psychic surgeon Alex Orbito of Philippines, Radha Swami Satsang Beas (RSSB), astrology, future predictions, dowsing, misleading ads on nutrition, search for ESP, efficacy of cow's urine, conversions, quack medicines like electrotherapy, electro homeo-therapy, magneto therapy, reflexology, color therapy, gem therapy, Reiki, *pranic* healing, acupuncture, aroma therapy etc, misleading pendulum diagnosis, divine miracle exposure demonstrations, haunted houses, exposure of poltergeist, spiritualism, snake myth (related to sale of motorbike!) etc. Though the book makes very interesting reading, at the same time one will feel sympathy for the gullible public. As author modifies the quote of P.T. Bernum, it is true that there are 100 suckers born every second in India!

As B Premanand puts on the book's blurb, Prof Narendra Nayak has actively spearheaded a crusade against superstitions often at great personal risk. He has debunked many a so called 'myth', miracles and ghost story. As a part of divine miracle exposure campaign Pro Nayak might have participated in hundreds of demos which involve materialization of *Vibhuti* from seemingly empty palm, lighting of fire in a *yagnya kunda* by yogic power, piercing of the tongue by a sharp pointed *trishul.* He not only demonstrates the trick as being claimed by the tricksters but also explains the scientific principle behind such miracles. There is a so called miracle of flame putting in the mouth. The scientific principle of the process by which a layer of water vapor protects the skin from burning – known as liedenfrost effect – is explained. He has also publicly exposed the outrageous claims of miracle men and godmen. His mission appears to be divine miracle exposure campaign.

Like B Premanand Prof Narendra Nayak has also written many articles and letters exposing Satya Sai Baba of Puttpurthy. In spite of stark evidences of murder, cheating, exploitation, quackery, trickery, etc this so called godman is still flourishing and attracting thousands of innocent devotees and amassing wealth. Prof Nayak describes incident of Lokayya Pujari's murder in the premises of a school run by Satya Sai Lokshikshan Trust, which caries on the cult activities of brain washing the students to believe in the godhood of Satya Sai Baba. Though there was hue and cry in the local press no one was punished and case was mysteriously closed by the bigwigs in the power to please their godman. In one of the letters written to the editor of Sunday weekly, Calcutta, Prof Nayak challenges Satya Sai Baba and his cronies to produce any object that Nayak asks for within 30 seconds, teleport an exact replica of a one rupee currency note which is placed in a sealed envelope, convert 5 litres of water in a sealed can to petrol, and disappear from the negative of the photograph taken along with him. . Obviously none came forward to exhibit their supernatural powers. Prof Nayak blames the media for their irresponsible attitude to glorify the charlatan like Satya Sai Baba.

Similarly Prof Nayak exposes the hoax of Kalki Bhagwan and describes the cult promoted by Kalki Bhagwan and his wife as one of those extortionist organizations aimed at exploiting the innocent and filling their coffers.

Mata Amritanandmayi is one more familiar name in Indian spiritual (as well as philanthropic!) world, for her hugging blessings and huge 'donations' to the 'social cause'. Prof Nayak traces her childhood history and her 'miraculous power' like lighting lamps without oil, curing a leper by sucking the pus and licking the wound (new medicine for leprosy!), multiplication of food etc. If her supernatural power is really working, all the problems of this country will be solved within no time. The 'Divine' mother has a very long list of celebrities and political leaders as her followers. Rationalists like Prof Nayak may challenge her but their challenge will be in vain and will never be accepted.

Art of living fame Sri Sri (?) Ravi Shankar - a disciple of world famous (notorious!) TM specialist Mahesh Yogi - claims that he is doing social service. According to Prof Nayak his so called social service is a fraud of the highest order. His *Sudarshan Kriya Yoga* claims that though it cannot make a poor man rich but it can make him happier man (without changing his economic status!). In fact for this social service, his cronies want him to be nominated for Noble peace prize.

The book contains many examples of this nature including local godmen like pilot baba, Varadaraj Pai etc. sometimes you feel very sad while reading these anecdotes which exploit the poor, common people making poor more poorer and rich more richer.

Readers will be quite amused while reading the articles and letters written by the author on astrology and its downright absurd, tall claims. Prof Nayak has a very good sense of humour since he challenges the astrologers every time whenever they advertise in the press. Prof Nayak promises them Rs 50,000 and his personal belongings who testifies his claims and proves it in front of an independent committee. No one has so far come forward to claim this amount and Prof Nayak still owns his personal belongings! He also challenges and announces the reward of Rs 50000 to the election result predictors to guess the results in advance before counting date. So far no one has guessed the results perfectly. The prize money is still in tact though a number of

elections took place during this period. In one of his letters to press, he takes a case of demotion of planet Pluto and discusses the effect on so called 'astrological science'. He comments on astrologers' habit of mixing astrology and astronomy and pretend that they can predict changes in human lives.

Prof Nayak narrates an instance of Valmiki Hanumanthrayappa of Tumkur dist who claims that due to power blessed by *Shani* (Saturn) he can name the playing cards without actually seeing them. Prof Nayak makes a fool of him in public by exposing his Saturn power. At the end he agreed that he never had any such powers. Going by Hanumanthrayappa's version, he is a much sought-after person in clubs and gambling dens. He had saved many from bankruptcy by predicting the cards with blessings of "*Shanidevaru*".

Prof Nayak had come across many quacks in his life time; some of them faith healers, some performing bloodless surgery, some diagnosing using pendulum, etc. Alex Orbito of Philippines, a faith healer, claimed that not only sending the divine vibrations but also operating upon patients and removing parts without a drop of blood or pain. His hands enter the abdomen area of a patient and draws tumours and such evil forces. During the surgery there is no pain, no antiseptic, no anesthesia, and the bleeding is minimal. The crowd gathered is impressed. If rationalist like Narendra Nayak tries to intervene, he will be thrown out by force. However Prof Nayak demonstrated this trick on TV. The viewers consisting of doctors and medical students were struck with awe.

While explaining the theory behind such quack medicine and alternate and complimentary therapies, Prof Nayak remarks that the so called cures work only with psychosomatic disorders and self-limiting illness. One can get relief from such jinx by the placebo effect of any therapy. But in many cases faith healing can be dangerous. However the faith healers make money out of patients' misery. Alex Orbito is said to have decamped with about a crore and half rupees collected from gullible people, many of whom hailed from economically weaker sections.

Benny Hinn is one more faith healer, an evangelist claiming that prayers can cure any disease including AIDs. The business of Benny Hinn, a multimillionaire with a fleet of jets, personal bodyguards and open display of wealth proves that what a good business religion can be. Benny Hinn's arrival and his prayer meetings used to irk BJP and Sangh Pariwar. BJP claimed that he is here for mass conversion of Hindus to Christians through prayers during faith healing session without substantiating their statement. . Hence Sangh Pariwar wanted that rationalists should join them to condemn Benny Hinn. Hackles of Sangh Pariwar were the impertinence of a *videsh*i trying to get into their business or rather their domain. Prof Nayak states that it is not understood as to why a country with 33 crore indigenous gods require a foreigner to come and pray for us! Every time faith healers have been challenged they have taken to their heels without accepting the challenge on one or the other pretext.

In one of his articles Narendra Nayak criticizes the VHP-BJP-RSS gang for promoting cow's urine as a cure all. The racket of selling the distillate of cow's urine for Rs 100 per litre! The gang claimed that it is a panacea – a cure for 148 diseases and a cure all – *sarva roga nivarini!* In fact cow's urine distillate has been granted patent no 6410059 by the US Patent Office! However saffron gang proclaims virtues of cow – not any cow but the Indian cow to be precise. The whole article makes a worth reading which describes the ingredients of urine its ill effect. Even author questions why not dog's milk. He pooh poohs the idea of *Shivambu* – drinking ones

own urine. After reading such articles one can conclude that you can fool all the people all the time!

Prof Nayak is not only an ardent rationalist but also a consumer activist. He had included a few articles on this subject viz; nutritional ads, proliferation of spiritual channels, orphanage racket, spiritualism as business etc. These articles make us aware of the greed of the concerned and how we as a consumer are being fooled.

Though most of the writings included in this chronicle are field experiences, there are a few thought provoking articles too. His comments on Naxalite movement, Superstitions as retardant of progress, Evaluation of spiritualism, Religious (in)tolerance, Challenges faced by rationalist movement, etc are very apt and makes us to think further. Prof Narendra Nayak reveals a plan of action for rationalist movement. This includes to develop a strong database, share the knowledge, investigate the phenomena, challenge the claimants, build support base, organize, use the media, react fast, set an example and do get involved.

With all his experience in the field and expertise on various aspects of rationalism author still feels that "have we managed to end the irrationalism inherent in people steeped with superstitions of centuries? Have we made the people more aware of scientific analysis of things before accepting them? The question is rather an open one. It is for us to see the challenges in the very broad perspective in terms of challenges for the next two decades; if not for longer while. "

Readers of the book will no doubt agree with these sentiments expressed by the author and act accordingly!

Battle against Supernatural
Prof Narendra Nayak
Skeptical Book No 25 (2007)
Price Rs 105; pp 288.

●●●

Fraud and Fake

If a paranormals could really give a properly researched demonstration of telepathy (precognition, psycho kinesis, reincarnation, perpetual motion, whatever it is) he would be the discoverer of a totally new principle, unknown to physical science. The discoverer of the new energy field that links mind to mind in telepathy, or of the new fundamental force that moves objects without trickery around a tabletop, deserves a Noble prize, and would probably get one. If you are in possession of this revolutionary secret of science why waste it on gimmicky television entertainment? Why not prove it properly and be hailed as the new Nation? Of course, we know the real answer. You can't do it, you are a fake. But thanks to gullible or cynical television producers, a well-healed fake….!

Richard Dawkins

Religious Excitement across Pakistan

Pervez Hoodbhoy

The sudden appearance of Prophet Mohammed's alleged footprint in the sleepy village of Dharabi near Chakwal has sent a wave of religious excitement across Pakistan. At a three-hour drive from Islamabad, Dharabi is now attracting tens of thousands of visitors from Swat to Karachi. They seek blessings, spiritual enlightenment, miracle-cures, and relief from life's other stresses. A road that is sparsely traveled in normal times is now clogged with traffic, vendors of food and drink are having a field day, new businesses selling pictures and holy paraphernalia have sprouted, and a permanent shrine is under construction. The village could not have hoped for better.

My encounter in mid-March with this phenomenon was accidental and preceded the heavy rush that came in subsequent weeks. While on the way to Chakwal, I became curious about the heavy police presence. Upon inquiring, I was told of a recent momentous event – a giant footprint was said to have suddenly appeared, which the local ulema promptly declared as belonging to the Holy Prophet. But this had ignited a fierce war of words between various religious factions in the larger Chakwal area. Some believers insist that the Prophet had left the earthly world once and forever, while others contend that he revisits it periodically to remind followers of his presence. The police had been called to prevent physical violence.

Conversations over tea with the Dharabi's inhabitants gave me some facts. However, the entire story soon receded to the back of my mind. It was revived several weeks later when it hit the national press and television. To augment my understanding I made phone calls to several villagers I had met, but discovered that new embellishments and inventions are being added by the day to the original narration of events. Village skeptics, on the other hand, are being silenced and speak only on the condition that their identities not be revealed.

The story begins on 12th Rabi-ul-Awwal, the Prophet's birthday, when celebrations were held as per village custom. This involves cooking sooji ka halwa in large flat iron dishes called karahis. Since there are no stoves large enough for the purpose, shallow holes are dug and then filled with twigs, charcoal, or other flammable material. After the cooking is done and the fires had dimmed, the holes are filled with loose earth. On that particular evening, I learned that there was a heavy rain shower.

And now the story goes like this: that evening a woman looked out into her backyard and saw a glow that appeared to move. In her excitement, she summoned her mother-in-law who says she also saw the glow. It appeared very briefly and was not seen subsequently (although a six-week later version is that it lasted for three days and was so bright that the house did not need electric lights!). The women also claimed that the glow was accompanied by a sweet smell. In the morning, the cooking area was discovered to have a mysterious ground impression. The rest is history.

What scientific explanation exists for this phenomenon? As a starter, readers of this article are invited to Google the "Dharabi miracle" where they will see countless uploads of photographs and hastily made celebratory videos. By straining one's imagination, some may be able to see a footprint. But its enormous size – between 3-4 feet long – would indicate that it belongs to the

long-sought mythical Himalayan Yeti rather than any human. The shape of the impression can be more plausibly explained as that of loose earth, brought together by rainwater, from two adjacent irregularly rounded cooking holes. It could also be the water-distorted image of two heavy round karhai's of different sizes placed on the soft earth. Or it could simply be deliberate fraud.

Assuming that the women had their wits about them, and had not been overpowered by the devotional intensity of the day's celebrations, the softly glowing ephemeral light could have multiple explanations. First, it is possible that a swarm of phosphorescent insects was somehow attracted to the cooking area. Bioluminescence in insects is a well known phenomenon. As in the common firefly known as jugnoo, "cold light" is produced via chemiluminescence.

It could also be that the organic matter buried in the holes, assisted by the heat of imperfectly quenched coals or twigs, could have converted into methane and phosphine gases. The latter is known to oxidize spontaneously upon coming into contact with air and can burn at a low temperature causing glowing light. Appearances of apparitions in western folklore, such as Jack-o'-the-Lantern or Will-o'-the-Wisp, have been traced by scientists to various flammable gases and insects.

A detailed investigation would involve looking at the soil composition, local entomology, and recorded statements of different witnesses. It seems, however, that the Dharabi event will be ignored by Pakistan's scientific institutions, of which there are well over two dozen. With exorbitant budgets but zero or little scientific output, some are housed in shiny new buildings on Islamabad's Constitution Avenue. These include the Pakistan Academy of Sciences, Committee on Science and Technology in the Islamic World (COMSTECH), COMSATS, Pakistan Science Foundation, Pakistan Council on Science and Technology, etc.

Unfortunately not one of the above or, for that matter, any other Pakistani scientific institute, has ever debunked the unreasonable and anti-scientific attitudes that one sees all around. For example, after the October 2005 earthquake that killed nearly 100,000, none challenged the view in the public media that this tragedy was a consequence of our bad deeds such as, for example, watching television or allowing unveiled women to go out of the house.

To be sure, superstitious beliefs exist in other countries as well. One recalls the hysteria in 1995 following the discovery that Lord Ganesh, the Elephant God, would "drink" milk if a spoon of milk was held up to his trunk. Even minor temples in India overflowed with superstitious devotees. So great was the rush of devotees that a traffic gridlock resulted in New Delhi and sales of milk jumped up by 30%.

Fortunately for India, an independent body, the Indian Rationalists Association, was quick to show that Ganesh's milk drinking had a simple physical explanation. It was shown to be simple capillary action – what everyone learns about in school science books. The surface tension of the milk was pulling the liquid up and out of the spoon, before gravity caused it to run down the front of the statue. To its credit, India's Ministry of Science and Technology confirmed the explanation and the country's religious craziness slowly abated. With such precedents, surely it is time for Pakistan's Ministry of Science and Technology to investigate the so-called Chakwal miracle, as well as the many similar superstitions that delude our people and keep them in a state of stupor and backwardness.

POSTSCRIPT: After this article was published in Dawn on 18 May 2010, the police authorities in Chakwal telephoned me to say that my version of events was accurate. Moreover, the authorities had poured cement upon the alleged footprint but "miraculously" it had been removed by some divine agency the very next morning. Mr. Tanvir's house, which houses the phenomenon, had a market value of Rs 250,000 a few months earlier but has just been sold at Rs. 2,000,000. He, and those of his family members who claim to have witnessed the light, have become pirs and pirnis with people queuing up for days to receive blessings. The family has hit the jackpot

●●●

Superstitions and Religion

- Superstition is child of ignorance and mother of misery.
- Miracles are not only impossible but they are unthinkable by any man capable of thinking.
- Ignorance is the soil in which belief and miracles grow.
- The man who cannot think is less than man, the man who will not think is a traitor himself, and the man who fears to think is superstition's slave.
- Reason is the light, the sun, of the brain; it is the compass of mind.
- Priestly community produces nothing. They are parasites. They say: "Believe and give".
- The man who bows before an idol of wood or stone is just a fool as he prays to an imagined god.
- Religion cannot reform mankind because religion is slavery.
- Religion does not teach self-reliance, independence, manliness, courage, self-defense. Religion makes god a master and man the serf.
- Religion has always been the enemy of science of investigation and thought.
- Religion has never made man moral, temperate, industrious, honest and free. That man has never received any help from heaven, that all sacrifices have been in vain and all prayers have died unanswered in the needless air.

RG Ingersoll

Yogification of America

Whitney Joiner

By now it's safe to say that the Great Yoga Takeover of America is complete. According to a 2008 Yoga Journal study, 15.8 million Americans engage in some form of the ancient Indian physical and meditative practice, spending almost $6 billion a year on yoga classes, mats, DVDs and exotic retreats. There's yoga for couples, yoga for babies, yoga for dogs. (As the New York Times reported recently, there's already a scrappy, populist yoga-for-the-people movement afoot, a backlash against the steep price tag of upward of $20 for a 70- or 90-minute class.)

But how, exactly, did yoga become so firmly entrenched in American culture? While its explosion is certainly a product of the last few decades, it still comes as a surprise -- given its massive popularity -- to find that not so long ago, yoga was considered dangerous, possibly evil, and certainly a threat to the chastity and delicate nature of American women. Yoga as home-wrecker? That's a new one.

It's all thanks to a man named Pierre Bernard, writes Robert Love, a magazine editor (*Rolling Stone, Best Life*) and professor at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, in his fascinating new book *"The Great Oom: The Improbable Birth of Yoga in America."* Born Perry Baker in Leon, Iowa, in 1876, Bernard started to study yoga -- both the physical poses, and a number of mystical spiritual teachings -- in his teens, working with a Syrian Indian teacher named Sylvais Hamati. After bringing yoga to the hypnotism-, occult- and magic-obsessed 1890s San Francisco, the charismatic and controversial Bernard eventually settled in Nyack, a town up the Hudson from New York City, where he opened an ashram that drew Broadway performers, prizefighters, British spies and a number of wealthy heiresses. He was derided as a fake and a charlatan by his critics, and deemed a guru by his followers, but without Bernard, nicknamed "the Great Oom" by the New York press, we might not be heading to our Saturday morning classes today, mats under our arms, ready to practice.

Salon spoke to Love over the phone about his new book, Bernard's colorful life story and his influence on yoga today -- and what he might think about those yoga-for-dogs classes.

The story of how you came to write "The Great Oom" is a colorful and fascinating tale on its own. How did you come to learn about Bernard?
When my wife and I moved into this stone cottage overlooking the Hudson, we found mystic symbols carved into the walls: on the back of the bathroom door there was a lion-headed snake, and an ankh carved into the granite above the front door. That tipped us off that there was something unusual about the house. And then our neighbor told us about this so-called father of yoga who had operated just down the hill from where we live.

He seems like such a product of his time: 1890s to 1920s America. What was happening then that allowed Bernard to prosper and gain a following?
Bernard devoted his entire life to teaching hatha yoga in America, from the time that he was a young man in San Francisco in the 1890s to 1955, when he died. When he grew up there was a fascination with the occult: secret powers and the ability to change the material world in front of people. The perception of yoga at the time was limited to photographs and stories of Indian yogis who could do fantastic feats of asceticism, lying on the proverbial bed of nails, hanging on a

hook over a fire, in some ways mortifying the body. While Bernard seemed to have a great respect for the other powers of yoga, he did deal with the esoteric and occult trappings associated with it; he gave demonstrations of trances in which needles were passed through his cheek and tongue and ears without any evidence of feeling pain. That was one of the first ways he came to the public's attention in 1898, when he gave one of these demonstrations and made the New York Times.
And the idea of these unseen powers was in the air at the time. Hypnotism was an obsession. We'd just come from inventions like the telegraph, in which invisible energy was conducted over wires; nobody knew the extent to which other marvelous invisible powers could be had.

How did he manage to change the public's perception of yoga?
At the same time that he was pitching the occult powers associated with yoga, he was also ministering to the rich and wealthy in terms of being a health guru, helping them with physical and psychological problems. He always played both sides of yoga's appeal to the public.
He was not only teaching yoga's health benefits but he was teaching it in classes, in the *Tantrik Order,* a secret society he started in San Francisco. It was kind of ordered on the model of the Freemasons and the theosophists, but it was a way of teaching yoga without saying the word "yoga."

The Tantrik Order was a secret society, and yet his mission was to popularize yoga. How does that make sense?
I don't think you do square it. In Bernard's life, you can kind of trace the path of yoga as it was perceived in America, from the hidden and occult view of it to the acceptance of it as a form of therapy for health. By the 1920s he'd put the Tantrik Order aside; it wasn't the main focus of his operation. When he moved up to Nyack, it was all about fresh air, cleanliness, hygiene and yoga as part of a full, well-lived life. He turned from the occult toward the idea of yoga as therapy, as sanctuary from a stressful world -- in the same way that yoga itself, or the way that we perceived it, has morphed.

Back then, yoga was actually perceived as a slippery slope to moral downfall, especially for women. Why?
It's fair to say that there was an American war against yoga in 1910 and the years afterward. Yoga had morphed from being the pastime of harmless eccentrics to something that was dangerous and subversive and possibly hurting the virtue of American women. It was based on some cases in which women gave away some amount of their fortunes to Indian swamis. In 1911, the Washington Post reported that the government was looking into this, conducting investigations. And certainly the fear that it was unleashing the sexuality of women. In the 1910s, the exoticness of it, the Orientalness of it, always came associated with loose sexuality. This wasn't American Christianity.

Bernard was arrested in 1910, at exactly the time of the passage of the Mann Act (the White-Slave Traffic Act), and charged with inveigling women into his den of sin for the purpose of sexual intercourse. He was thrown into jail in 1910 and spent the entire summer. He was released later in the year, and the charges were ultimately dropped. The entire nation was seized by this fear that there was a conspiracy of foreigners to steal American women. There were purity and vice commissions set up around the country.
What were these turn-of-the-century yogis looking for?

We think people who lived 100 years ago were not stressed out, but they were. People came to him for all kinds of medical and stress issues. He turned around people who were in trouble physically or mentally, and promised peace of mind and the ennobling of the spirit.

Today, part of what makes yoga so popular is its vague spirituality, a kind of free-floating message about acceptance and oneness. How does that connect to what he was teaching then?
What he believed was a kind of amalgamation of Hindu tantric beliefs. It was centered on worship of Shakti, the feminine power and regeneration principle. A kind of a worship of the body was at the heart of Bernard's beliefs. Also, that all truth is sacred, that nobody really has a direct line on truth that it's there in Hinduism and Buddhism and Christianity. There was never any dogma attached to what Bernard taught; it was a practical spirituality that gave results -- making it very modern, related to the mind-cure movement at the time and to the New Age movement of today.
That's the thing that's wonderful about yoga. It's a step-by-step practical spiritual philosophy. He saw it that way, and that kind of hooks it up to the way we think about it. He was the guy that made yoga safe for America, and vice versa, in many ways.

Today, yoga is a spiritual and physical cure-all, a panacea for everything that ails us. And it's a huge commercial industry. There's even yoga for dogs, and babies. What do you think he'd make of what yoga has become?
Part of his influence was that he did set the stage for the commercialization of yoga. But he himself catered to the carriage trade. His life was based on an American model of the guru-student relationship; most of the people who came to the club had personal relationships with him. They weren't just students; he was their guru. I think he would've turned up his nose at the variations of yoga -- dog yoga, things like that.

Did the yoga he taught actually look like what we know of yoga today?
There are no films of it, but there are photographs of people doing the asanas that we would recognize today.

It was fascinating to see him develop in the same kind of guru vs. huckster dynamic we've seen in other controversial religious and spiritual figures who've brought Eastern spirituality to the West. In your last chapter, you ask whether he was a genius or a fraud, but you don't come down specifically on one side or another. What is your baseline feeling on Bernard?
I don't think you can call him an out-and-out fraud, or a charlatan, and I certainly think you can call him one of yoga's pioneers in America, and also someone who cared deeply about yoga and made it his entire life's mission. Did he do things that were immoral or illegal at certain times in his life? He did. He was a rogue with a scandalous past. He wasn't a devil, and he wasn't a saint.

Besides the same physical practice, do you think the same spiritual strains are here now?
That's a hard question to answer, because what is the spirituality of yoga? There's a gauzy spirituality that yoga classes come wrapped in, but it's not a hard-edge spirituality with very much discipline besides getting to class, as far as I can tell. Yoga absolutely came from a spiritual discipline in India, so it's not surprising that it has spiritual components; we have tended to concentrate on the physical aspects of yoga in America and seem to, only lately, be more interested in the spiritual side.

●●●

He Sets Guinness Record for Projecting Social Cause

Supriya Shelar

Twenty years back, the city witnessed the making of a Guinness Book of World Record, but for a social cause. Milind Deshmukh, a Maharashtra Andhashrdha Nirmulan Samiti (MANS) activist walked a distance of 65 km balancing a half litre milk bottle on his head. Celebrating the 20th anniversary of his record, Milind has become more active in creating public awareness about black magic and superstitions.

On March 22,1990 Milind walked from Pune to Lonavala with a milk bottle balanced on his head. The record was broken by an American the next year. So he again successfully attempted a second record on May 13,1993, when he walked a distance of 104.2 km. Is it the greed of being famous made Milind to experiment with such an exercise? Off course not. The record feat was meant for conveying the message- 'Do not connect the usual happenings with the super natural powers. Any miracle can be achieved by hard work and practice."

Recalling the record-making day, Milind, who is the acting secretary of MANS, told Sakaal Times, "In late 80s, after reading Dr Narendra Dabholkar's book on superstitions, I started thinking rationally. While chit-chatting with my colleagues at Bajaj Auto, I used to explain the logic and scientific phenomenon behind any miracle. Once accepting a challenge made by one of colleagues, I walked 300 meters carrying a handa (water-container) on my head. I was confident because I was champion in balancing objects since childhood."

The practice of carrying water- containers on his head since childhood, made him perfect in balancing. This practice was converted into a world record, when he came across a book on Guinness Book of World Records. He read about a record of walking 38.6 km with a milk bottle balanced on the head. Very much ambitious, Milind contacted the London office of Guinness Book of world Record and thus he held the world record by walking non-stop for 13 hours. Milind, viewed the feat as an eye opener for people having blind faith in God, customs or even in an individual. "I was born and brought up in a religious family. But when I observed contrast happening around me, I rebelled and started analysing every thing," he said. The strong will to emphasise that ordinary people, like me, also can achieve great things, just by acquiring skills and techniques, motivated me to set the record, he said, further adding that now he is not interested in holding another record, as he has no time to practice.

After taking voluntary retirement from Bajaj Auto two years back, the record-maker is busy full time in the activities of MANS. "There is a lot of work to do in this context. Marking the 20th anniversary of the record, MANS has planned to reach out to 20,000 youths across the state and connect them to the anti-superstition movement. We would Focus on selecting 2000 odd students of D Ed, for our foundation course on this topic. It will help in inculcating scientific values among schoolchildren," he said.

Courtesy: *Sakal Times*

●●●

Martin Gardner (1914–2010): Founder of the Modern Skeptical Movement

Michael Shermer

This past weekend the world darkened with the loss of one of its brightest lights: Martin Gardner, polymath extraordinaire, founding father of the modern skeptical movement, and a friend.. The following is an interview between Martin Gardner and Michael Shermer that appeared in Skeptic magazine Vol. 5, No. 2 (1997).

Short of listing all his books, articles, essays, reviews, and letters published over the last 65 years — which would fill the space for this entire interview — how does one capture in a couple of paragraphs the life of one of the most prolific science writers of our century, especially one who also nearly single-handedly founded the modern skeptical movement with his 1954 book, *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science*?

This October 21 Martin Gardner turns 83, and as he settles into his writing chair that day, he can reflect back on a life well-lived, knowing that there was little of importance he did not reflect upon (and usually write about). In fact, "science writer" is really an unfair description. In other circles Gardner is as well-known for his "annotated" series of books as he is for his 25 years as columnist for *Scientific American*. He annotated no less than *Alice*, the *Snark*, the *Ancient Mariner*, *Casey at the Bat*, the *Innocence of Father Brown*, and even the *Night Before Christmas*. He wrote an autobiographical novel (*The Flight of Peter Fromm*), a book of short stories (*The No-Sided Professor*), and histories of Mary Baker Eddy and Urantia, the "Great Cult Mystery." His mathematical games column was republished in numerous books, and he dabbled enough in magic to pen several works, including *The Encyclopedia of Impromptu Magic*. The best single-volume collection of Gardner's works to date, spanning 1938–1995, is *The Night is Large* from St. Martin's Press.

Born in 1914 (he is a firstborn with a younger brother and sister), Gardner served in the Second World War on a destroyer escort in the Atlantic. During those four years, Gardner honed his writing skills editing a weekly newspaper called *The Badger Navy News*. For his final two years, however, he saw action in the "Killer Group," who looked for German U-boats to sink. Gardner attended the University of Chicago "in the Adler-Hutchins heyday." In high school, he explained, he wanted to be a physicist and go to Caltech, "but they didn't take students until you had two years of general education. So I went to the University of Chicago because Hutchins had just become president and they had a new program that appealed to me where you had complete freedom to go at your own speed. If you passed a test in a course you didn't have to take the course. It was noncompulsory class attendance. Nobody checked to see if you attended and I think I audited more courses than I actually signed up for."

In his third year Gardner decided to major in philosophy. "The philosophy department had been crippled when Hutchins brought in Adler from Columbia University and put him in philosophy without getting the permission of the dean of the department, resulting in a big walkout of philosophers." Hutchins withdrew Adler from the department and put him in the Law School. "Those were the days when Adler was practically a Roman Catholic. I have a very rare

document that is a typed copy of a speech he gave about a year after he came to Chicago in which he defended the Catholic Church as the one true religion, and there is a passage in which, believe it or not, he defends the right of the church to burn heretics. That was a younger Adler. He is very much ashamed of this speech."

Following his undergraduate training, Gardner took a year of graduate work at Chicago but then decided he didn't want to teach and instead became a fulltime writer. "Then the war came, but after the war I took another year of graduate work under the G.I. bill and this is when I took this course that Rudolf Carnap gave on the philosophy of science. This is when I really got interested in science."

Where does Gardner get his drive and intellectual curiosity? He was raised in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where Gardner's father earned a doctorate in geology, specializing in limestone caverns (even publishing several technical papers on the subject). "He ended up in petroleum geology when the oil business was just starting, and that is how we ended up in Tulsa." One of the last of the wildcatters, the senior Gardner had his own company that consisted only of himself and a secretary. He would do his own geological exploration until he found what looked like a dome with oil in it, then would hire a drilling company to drill it for him. "His company was up and down. Most of the time nothing happened but when he got a big hit it paid for the losses." Not all of Gardner's books have been big hits (it is hard to be popular when skewering sacred cows), but the ones he has had have more than paid for the losses, as he explained to *Skeptic*.

Skeptic: *You are a prolific writer. How do you do it? Do you have a daily schedule you stick to? Do you try to write six hours a day, or 10 pages a day?*
Gardner: No, it is a very flexible schedule. Since I don't have a job I have a lot of free time. My working time is as much time as I can grab from other things I have to do. If a person doesn't have a job, and isn't teaching, it isn't surprising to be able to write a lot of books. In fact, I marvel at the people who write as much as they do and at the same time hold down a teaching position.

Skeptic: *You are one of the founders of the modern skeptical movement. Is it pretentious of us to call ourselves a movement? Is there such a thing? And what are we, humanists, skeptics, free thinkers?*
Gardner: Obviously there is a movement although I don't know how much good it is doing. I think the word skeptic is best, although there is a wide variety of beliefs among skeptics. William Jarvis [Director of the National Council Against Health Fraud], for example, is a Seventh-day Adventist.

Skeptic: *In the skeptical movement we worry about how "bad" things are with regard to weird beliefs. If you compare things to 500 years ago with regard to superstitions and irrationalities, it is much better. But within our time, how bad do you think it is? Are things better now than they were in, say, the 1980s?*
Gardner: I really don't know how to answer that. In some ways we have made tremendous progress and in other ways we have gone the opposite direction. There are more people who believe in astrology now than in the 19th century. If you go back 100 years it would be hard to find a newspaper with an astrology column, and now it is hard to find one without one!

Skeptic: *What can we do? Or, perhaps I should say, what more can we do?*
Gardner: I don't know that we can do more than what we are already doing in the skeptical magazines like *Skeptic* and *Skeptical Inquirer*, and books like Carl Sagan's *Demon Haunted World*. We just need to do more of that.

Skeptic: *Inevitably skepticism leads to asking the God question. You call yourself a fideist.*
Gardner: I call myself a philosophical theist, or sometimes a fideist, who believes something on the basis of emotional reasons rather than intellectual reasons.

Skeptic: *This will surely strike readers as something of a paradox for a man who is so skeptical about so many things.*
Gardner: People think that if you don't believe Uri Geller can bend spoons then you must be an atheist. But I think these are two different things. I call myself a philosophical theist in the tradition of Kant, Charles Peirce, William James, and especially Miguel Unamuno, one of my favorite philosophers. As a fideist I don't think there are any arguments that prove the existence of God or the immortality of the soul. Even more than that, I agree with Unamuno that the atheists have the better arguments. So it is a case of quixotic emotional belief that is really against the evidence and against the odds. The classic essay in defense of fideism is William James' *The Will to Believe*. James' argument, in essence, is that if you have strong emotional reasons for a metaphysical belief, and it is not strongly contradicted by science or logical reasons, then you have a right to make a leap of faith if it provides sufficient satisfaction.
It makes the atheists furious when you take this position because they can no more argue with you than they can argue over whether you like the taste of beer or not. To me it is entirely an emotional thing.

Skeptic: *Couldn't someone make this same argument for belief in New Age hokum? Couldn't they quote you in support of their beliefs?*
Gardner: They could use that argument, except New Agers also have a whole series of beliefs that can be empirically refuted. Like reincarnation — the evidence against that is overwhelming. Most New Agers also accept most of the beliefs of the parapsychologists. They believe in ESP and PK and channeling. We have very strong empirical evidence against these beliefs. So I think there is a big difference between belief in God and belief in the paranormal.
William James made this clear in *The Will to Believe*. In the first place, it has to be a leap of faith about something that has overwhelming importance to an individual. Second, it has to be something for which there isn't any strong empirical evidence or logical argument against it. So there is something radically different about belief in a mind behind the universe and the whole cluster of beliefs that the New Age movement presents.

Skeptic: *So in your earlier statement that the atheists' arguments are better than the theists' arguments, you must mean only slightly better.*
Gardner: Well, they are better in the sense that the theist has a tremendous problem of explaining the existence of evil, and to me that is the strongest argument against God. If there is a God and he is all powerful and all good, why does he allow evil into the world? Evil exists, so is God all good but not all powerful? Or is he all powerful but not all good? That is a very powerful argument and I don't know of any good way to answer it.

Skeptic: *What about life after death?*

Gardner: If you believe in God at all, I think you have to believe in a personal God, in a sense. That is, you have to assign to God something analogous to human mind because that is the highest type mind we are acquainted with. If God is just another name for nature then I think it is more honest just to say we are humanists.

Skeptic: *So your God is not Spinoza's God.*
Gardner: That's right. I regard Spinoza as essentially an atheist, because to him God and Nature were synonymous. In his writings you could replace the term "God" with the term "Nature" and it doesn't change anything.

Skeptic: *That's not what most people mean by "God."*
Gardner: No, and of course if you do believe in a personal God it is in an analogical sense, so I sometimes like to call myself a theological positivist because I agree completely with Carnap that metaphysical questions are meaningless — if you can't get at it by logic or by science you really can't say anything at all about the question.

If you ask me for details about the nature of God I would have to answer "I don't know." The kind of God I believe in is so completely transcendent and so wholly Other that you really can't say anything about God's nature. To ask, for example, whether God is inside or outside of time, I have no idea what this means or how to reply to it. I can understand arguments saying he is in time, coming from the process theologians; on the other hand I can understand the arguments that place God completely outside of time, in some sort of realm in which time has no meaning. But these are metaphysical arguments and Carnap would say they are meaningless questions, and I would agree to that.

Skeptic: *You don't pray, do you?*
Gardner: I do.

Skeptic: *You do? Every day?*
Gardner: No, not every day. But I think if you believe there is a creator with a mind somewhat analogous to the human mind, the impulse to pray is pretty overwhelming. Obviously you don't ask to change the weather or help the football team to win. But I think if you believe in God at all you have an impulse to worship in the sense of offering thanks and asking for forgiveness.

Skeptic: *Your wife?*
Gardner: My wife is Jewish. We are a mixed marriage. She has a Jewish background and I have a Methodist background, but we both ended up outside of any particular church tradition. I don't go to church, and neither does she.

Skeptic: *What about the Unitarians?*
Gardner: I could be a Unitarian except the Unitarian church has turned out to be essentially a secular humanist church. Most Unitarian ministers are atheists. I have no desire to get up on Sunday to go hear a lecture on ethics, especially if the minister is not particularly bright.

Skeptic: *So you would not call yourself a humanist or secular humanist.*
Gardner: No, I would not. Paul Kurtz wanted to give me a secular humanist award once and I turned it down on the grounds that I don't consider myself a secular humanist.

Skeptic: *What about immortality?*
Gardner: I think if you believe in a personal God you have a right to hope for it. But it is more a hope than anything else. There is certainly no empirical evidence for life after death, and no rational argument for it. Again, the atheists have all the best arguments because obviously our mind is dependent on a physical brain, and if the brain is destroyed then how could we live again?

Skeptic: *Couldn't you take your emotional leap here?*
Gardner: I don't think you can believe in a personal God without believing in the possibility of immortality.

Skeptic: *In other words, if you are going to make one leap you can make both leaps.*
Gardner: Yes, because God would be a very peculiar God if he did not allow for some kind of justice in the universe. If there is no life after death there isn't any justice. The hoped-for life after death is very much tied into a personal God. Kant believed in immortality and defended it on what I would call pragmatic grounds. He denied that there are any rational arguments for believing in either God or immortality, but he defended them on the grounds that it is the only way to turn the universe into a moral universe. It was essentially a fideist argument. William James wrote a whole book about this, and Peirce, Unamuno, and plenty of philosophers in the distant past going all the way back to Plato believed in immortality.

Skeptic: *Are your ethics and morals driven by fideism? With fideism, you don't need natural ethics or evolutionary ethics, right?*
Gardner: Actually I do think that ethics can rest on a naturalistic basis. And I defend that in my book *The Whys of a Philosophical Scrivener*. My views on ethics are the same as John Dewey's. If you grant that there is a human nature that is common to all individuals — and I believe there is a common human nature, I don't believe in cultural or moral relativism — then individuals have certain basic needs and you can judge a society and a moral system by the degree to which it maximizes or satisfies those needs. So I don't think you need to inject God into that process at all.

Skeptic: *Some of these ethical issues seem irresolvable on a natural basis. Like abortion. How do you come down one side or the other using science or reason, without calling on something higher, like "rights," which is itself a metaphysical concept?*
Gardner: There are questions in ethics for which it is very, very difficult to decide what the answer should be. I believe in what is called emotive ethics. If you build up a naturalistic ethics you have to base it on a set of axioms, but you can't defend the axioms except on an emotional basis. For example, one of the axioms that lie at the heart of naturalistic ethics is the notion that it is better to be alive than dead. There is no logical basis for it and you can't defend it empirically. If a person says "I think it is better to be dead than alive," it is very difficult to talk him out of it.

Skeptic: *Couldn't you make an evolutionary argument here — that it is in our genes to make us want to be alive instead of dead, in order to propagate the genes.*
Gardner: Yes, or to take another axiom, it is better to be healthy than sick. You have to have these axioms in order to derive a naturalistic ethics.

Skeptic: *Could you use this same line of reasoning for political systems? Could you argue, for example, that all people seek greater happiness and then prove scientifically that this political system is better than that political system, but if you ask people they will say this or that, and that is what democracy is all about, right? You are essentially asking people, in an emotive way, which system they like best.*
Gardner: The empirical system comes in, in a sense, because you can ask whether *this* society meets human needs better or worse than *that* society. So you can make value judgments across lines. But the value judgments have to rest finally on a set of emotional posits. I do think you can compare cultures and say that Culture A is superior to Culture B in meeting the needs of its people. And you can also say that certain culture practices are bad or good. For example, there are tens of thousands of African women whose genitals are mutilated. I think you are justified in saying that it is a bad practice and should be abolished.

Skeptic: *In Skeptic Vol. 4, No. 2 I used that same example in my essay on evolutionary ethics. But in a conversation with Carol Tavris, when I suggested that by asking these women how they feel about it we could derive an ethical principle that it is wrong, she pointed out that many of them would probably approve of the mutilation because that is what their culture dictates. So aren't we just imposing our values on someone else? How do we derive an ethical principle that genital mutilation is an immoral act without resorting to some metaphysical argument?*
Gardner: I guess ultimately you have to justify it by whether a culture has good survival ability or not. This is a problem since some of the women actually *want* to go through the mutilation process. A cultural anthropologist would probably defend the practice on the grounds that within those cultures it serves its purpose. On that grounds, however, you could make the same argument about the Holocaust — the Nazis believed it was a good thing to exterminate the Jews.

Skeptic: *Couldn't a pro-life/anti-abortionist make the argument that it is better for a fetus to be alive than dead, since it is at least a potential human? How would you respond to that argument?*
Gardner: I don't know how to respond to it because we are getting into ethical questions for which there really are no solid rules. I don't think there is an identity independent of the brain. I don't think the brain of an embryo is developed well enough to call it a human person. But it is a tough argument because it is on a continuum and there is no right place to draw the line.

Skeptic: *Frank Tipler makes a similar argument for immortality: that personal identity is linked to the brain, and the brain is nothing more than information processing. Tipler foresees a day in the far future of the universe when brains could be duplicated in computers.*
Gardner: He is assuming that computers could replicate a perfect human being. I grant that this is possible, maybe in the far future. But I agree with Penrose that it would have to be a type of computer we don't know how to build yet. Since that is in the far future, I don't have an opinion on it.
But you can defend immortality on the grounds that everything that constitutes our selves or our identity is a mathematical pattern. If superstring theory turns out to be true then you can ask what are superstrings made up of, and they aren't made of anything! If all matter is pure mathematics, then you can imagine that an all powerful deity who knew the pattern could reconstruct you. So that is similar to what Tipler is saying, in a sense.

Skeptic: *I wonder, then, if this shouldn't be called protoscience, rather than pseudoscience? Like cryonics. It is not impossible. There are no laws of nature that we know of that prevent it*

from happening. It is just not verifiable at this point. It is fairly unlikely, but not completely unlikely.
Gardner: I would go along with that.

Skeptic: *What the cryonicists are saying is that once you are cremated your pattern is gone, but if you are frozen there is at least some hope of revising or reconstructing the pattern. They are actually quite pro-science. They argue that you can look at how far science and technology have come in the last century and imagine what it will be able to accomplish in the next 10 or 100 centuries.*
Gardner: That seems reasonable although I think we are a long way from understanding enough science to accomplish this. And when it comes to human behavior, while there are some uses of science in fields like economics and psychology, there is the problem of human free will that makes prediction extremely difficult. On this question of free will, as a member of a group called the mysterians I believe that we have no idea whether free will exists or how it works.

Skeptic: *You don't believe free will is at the quantum level, like some physicists do?*
Gardner: It doesn't help you if it is at the quantum level. That just makes it a random event, as if there is some kind of a roulette wheel in the brain. That doesn't give you a choice. There are certain things I regard as ultimate mysteries. Free will is one of those. Another is time. I don't think we have the slightest idea of what time is. You can't define time without introducing time into the definition, so you just have to accept it as given. The same thing is true with space. Time and space are ultimate mysteries. Free will is bound up in the mysteries of time about which we can never understand, at least at this stage of our evolutionary history. I think it is quite possible that a million years from now there will be creatures on the earth that will be as far beyond us in understanding some of these mysteries as we are beyond the mind of a chimpanzee.

Skeptic: *Here you are being rather un-Gouldian. Gould sees contingency entering rather strongly into the system so that there is no real progress toward this far future humanoid creature you envision.*
Gardner: I don't agree with Gould that there is no progress in evolution. I can't understand how he can say that. It is so obvious that the human mind is far more advanced and complicated than anything else. If you look at the history of evolution there is a steady progression of complexity in the nervous system and there is no reason to think that this will not continue since it has been increasing for millions of years. To suppose that this is just sort of an accident, and that evolution could just as easily take a turn the other way toward less complexity, just doesn't seem right to me.

Skeptic: *Tell me about this mysterian group.*
Gardner: The mysterians are not an organized group or anything. We don't hold meetings. Mysterians believe that at this point in our evolutionary history there are mysteries that cannot be resolved, like free will. Noam Chomsky, for example, is a mysterian. He is on record saying that we don't have the mental capacity to understand the nature of free will. John Searle is a mysterian. But the leading figure is a philosopher named Colin McGinn. He's written a whole book about this.

Skeptic: *Why not just leave the whole question of God and immortality as one of these mysterian mysteries?*

Gardner: Well, sure, if a person wants to be an agnostic and leave it at that I have no objections. It is just that some people are so constituted that a desire to believe in an ultimate meaning in the universe which you can supply only by a leap of faith is so overwhelming that they cannot not make the leap. I'm one of those individuals.

Skeptic: *What are your politics?*
Gardner: I call myself a democratic socialist because I believe that government controls are necessary. You have to have a government that is making certain plans to prevent chaos and to maximize the happiness of the citizens. It seems to me that if you want genuine competition you have to prevent monopolies from taking over, and you can't do that without a government. So when I call myself a democratic socialist I'm assuming America is already a democratic socialist society. Actually, a lot of conservative economists say that. Milton Friedman, in his book Free to Choose, calls America democratic socialist. He wants to reverse that and go back to the days of Herbert Hoover and to the days of less government controls.
But as I argue in *The Whys of a Philosophical Scrivener*, there may not even be a best government system. There may be different systems that are equally good at satisfying the needs of the people.

Skeptic: *You are not a cultural relativist so you are not saying that all political systems are equal, are you?*
Gardner: No, they are not all equal. But it is quite possible that there are equal alternatives in ways of governing a society that are equally good. Democracy has the problem of what type of voting system best reflects the will of the people. There are all kinds of competing systems and it is very hard to decide whether one is better than another. And they all have imperfections.

Skeptic: *Give us your thoughts on some specific claims: JFK conspiracy.*
Gardner: Lone assassin — Oswald acted alone. Most of the conspiracy theories are very unrealistic in terms of the opportunity and motives of the so-called conspirators. Castro, maybe, had a motive with the Bay of Pigs incident and all that, but there is no evidence that he was involved.

Skeptic: *Hypnosis — altered state or just fantasy role playing?*
Gardner: I'm really open-minded about that. For years I assumed that it was an altered state. The problem is that there isn't any test you can make that will show a person is in a trance state. I'm open to the theory that there are individuals who are strongly suggestible and just want to do whatever the hypnotist wants them to do, and thus it is really not an altered state of consciousness at all. I know that the stage hypnotists have a tricky way of filtering out the people who are uncooperative, such as seeing if they can pull their hands apart. So they end up not so much with individuals who are capable of going into an altered state, but with with individuals who want to do whatever the hypnotist tells them.

Skeptic: *So, hypnosis can't pass the Popperian test of falsifiability? Is it doomed to one of your mysterian mysteries?*
Gardner: No, I think it might be eventually decided one way or the other. Those who claim it is a trance point to such things as sticking a needle through a person's arm, but that's not very definitive because there is not that much pain in sticking a needle through your arm. I can imagine someone just not wincing. Same thing with post-hypnotic suggestions. Perhaps they so want to please the hypnotist that when he gives the cue they just do what they are suppose to do.

Skeptic: *Can something be a science if it is not falsifiable? Do you go with the strict Popperian falsifiable criteria?*
Gardner: No, I think there are two sides to confirmation. One side is finding positive evidence and the other is finding negative evidence. I think Popper made the mistake of emphasizing one over the other. For every scientific conjecture you can make there is the opposite conjecture. So if you falsify one conjecture you are really confirming the opposite. Suppose someone conjectures that there is life on Mars. Most scientists would agree that if we go to Mars and find life, we have confirmed the statement "there is life on Mars." Popper would want to say "no, you have simply falsified the statement 'there is no life on Mars'." I don't see any difference. Every scientific conjecture can be either confirmed or falsified. I'm on Carnap's side here. He debated Popper on this issue of the role of induction. I think Popper was extremely jealous of Carnap's higher reputation at the time and wanted to find something on which to differ strongly from Carnap. I don't think falsification is as important as he made it.

Skeptic: *Are first-principle statements like "it is better to be alive than dead" verifiable or falsifiable? Are these philosophical or scientific statements?*
Gardner: I don't think these are scientific statements. To say it is better to be alive than dead is what Kant called an "ought statement." And I don't think science can make statements about the way things ought to be.

Skeptic: *Is all economic theory philosophy then?*
Gardner: The underlying assumptions are not scientific. But once you've made those assumptions, you can go in and use empirical methods to find out to what extent the assumptions are true. Take the statement "it is better not to die of starvation." It is a scientific process to investigate a culture to see whether it is allowing people to starve or not.

Skeptic: *Race and IQ. What do you think intelligence is?*
Gardner: Oh, gosh, I don't know. I agree with Minsky and those who say it is not one single thing but many components. Whether there is something called intelligence that overrides all these different aspects, I really don't know.

Skeptic: *What about genius?*
Gardner: I think the kind of creativity that someone like Einstein had is not very well understood, but I wouldn't say it cannot be understood. Every time someone writes a book on creativity I read it and I'm always impressed by how little they have to say about what happens in a person's mind. I think it will be a long, long time before a computer can be genuinely creative in a way that Einstein was in his relativity theory. The current checkers champion is a computer. And now the best chess player seems to be a computer. But these games are little more than sophisticated tic-tac-toe games. These computers no more "know" they are playing checkers or chess than your lawn mower "knows" it is mowing your lawn. The creative process is something entirely different.

Skeptic: *What goes on in your creative mind when you are doing these clever mathematical games?*
Gardner: I'm not a creative mathematician in any sense. Oh, I've invented a few puzzles but they are very low level math. I get the journals and read what the real mathematicians write about. Of course, this is the secret to the success of my column. By not knowing much

mathematics it was hard for me to understand what I was writing about so I had to learn how to explain it so the general reader could understand it.

Skeptic: *What are your thoughts on a potential unified theory of everything?*
Gardner: Superstrings may turn out to unify basic laws of nature, such as gravity and electromagnetism. But it will leave open all kinds of questions that will lead to new conjectures. We do not have the foggiest notion of what they will be like. Penrose is now working on twister theory, which is sort of a rival to superstring theory. If that turns out to be right there will be a real paradigm shift. It is a theory of geometry that underlies the particle theory and quantum mechanics.

Skeptic: *What about chaos theory?*
Gardner: It is fashionable and interesting, but I think it is mostly fractal geometry. I think it is more of a temporary fad like catastrophe theory.

Skeptic: *But Gell-Mann and his colleagues at the Santa Fe Institute are doing a lot more than fractal geometry. They are using computers to model economic and historical systems.*
Gardner: I've not followed what they are doing all that closely, but Gell-Mann is someone who puzzles me. He believes in the many-worlds interpretation of quantum mechanics, which I think is completely insane. And most physicists think it is insane as well. I can't think of any theory that violates Occum's razor more than the many-worlds interpretation. I know it eliminates many of the paradoxes of quantum mechanics, but it does so by bringing in billions and billions of worlds that are branching off from each other and I don't know how anyone can take that seriously.

Skeptic: *You've had a few things to say about Hillary Clinton and her foray into the New Age.*
Gardner: I have a big file on Jean Huston and her husband Robert Masters, who is a psychologist. They have been doing experiments for decades on people, where they put them into trances, hypnotic states, etc., then test them for their psychic abilities. Allegedly they are more psychic in these states. I suspect Hillary didn't know about this. Huston and her husband collaborated on a book called *Mind Games*. These are games for raising your potential, and one of the games is talking to someone you admire. As far as I know this is all she did with Hillary.

Skeptic: *The Sokal hoax ("Deconstructing Gravity").*
Gardner: Beautiful.

Skeptic: *Did he go too far? Isn't there some room for the study of the social construction of science? Science is, after all, conducted by humans firmly embedded in a culture.*
Gardner: Yes, but I think everyone knows that science is influenced by culture and that society often dictates the sorts of questions scientists try to answer. Every working scientist knows this. It is so obvious as to be trivial. An editorial in the New York Times likened science to the rules in baseball. Well, of course the rules of baseball are socially constructed, but to liken this to science is utterly preposterous. Science is a process of discovering rules that are part of an external world and that can be verified.

Skeptic: *That is a powerful statement with which to close this interview. Thank you very much for your insights.*

●●●

Born Believers:
How your brain creates God

Michael Brooks

WHILE many institutions collapsed during the Great Depression that began in 1929, one kind did rather well. During this leanest of times, the strictest, most authoritarian churches saw a surge in attendance. This anomaly was documented in the early 1970s, but only now is science beginning to tell us why. It turns out that human beings have a natural inclination for religious belief, especially during hard times. Our brains effortlessly conjure up an imaginary world of spirits, gods and monsters, and the more insecure we feel, the harder it is to resist the pull of this supernatural world. It seems that our minds are finely tuned to believe in gods.

Religious ideas are common to all cultures: like language and music, they seem to be part of what it is to be human. Until recently, science has largely shied away from asking why. "It's not that religion is not important," says Paul Bloom, a psychologist at Yale University, "it's that the taboo nature of the topic has meant there has been little progress." The origin of religious belief is something of a mystery, but in recent years scientists have started to make suggestions. One leading idea is that religion is an evolutionary adaptation that makes people more likely to survive and pass their genes onto the next generation. In this view, shared religious belief helped our ancestors form tightly knit groups that cooperated in hunting, foraging and childcare, enabling these groups to out-compete others. In this way, the theory goes, religion was selected for by evolution, and eventually permeated every human society

The religion-as-an-adaptation theory doesn't wash with everybody, however. As anthropologist Scott Atran of the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor points out, the benefits of holding such unfounded beliefs are questionable, in terms of evolutionary fitness. "I don't think the idea makes much sense, given the kinds of things you find in religion," he says. A belief in life after death, for example, is hardly compatible with surviving in the here-and-now and propagating your genes. Moreover, if there are adaptive advantages of religion, they do not explain its origin, but simply how it spread. An alternative being put forward by Atran and others is that religion emerges as a natural by-product of the way the human mind works.

That's not to say that the human brain has a "god module" in the same way that it has a language module that evolved specifically for acquiring language. Rather, some of the unique cognitive capacities that have made us so successful as a species also work together to create a tendency for supernatural thinking. "There's now a lot of evidence that some of the foundations for our religious beliefs are hard-wired," says Bloom.

Much of that evidence comes from experiments carried out on children, who are seen as revealing a "default state" of the mind that persists, albeit in modified form, into adulthood. "Children the world over have a strong natural receptivity to believing in gods because of the way their minds work, and this early developing receptivity continues to anchor our intuitive thinking throughout life," says anthropologist Justin Barrett of the University of Oxford.
So how does the brain conjure up gods? One of the key factors, says Bloom, is the fact that our brains have separate cognitive systems for dealing with living things - things with minds, or at least volition - and inanimate objects.

This separation happens very early in life. Bloom and colleagues have shown that babies as young as five months make a distinction between inanimate objects and people. Shown a box moving in a stop-start way, babies show surprise. But a person moving in the same way elicits no surprise. To babies, objects ought to obey the laws of physics and move in a predictable way. People, on the other hand, have their own intentions and goals, and move however they choose.

Mind and matter

Bloom says the two systems are autonomous, leaving us with two viewpoints on the world: one that deals with minds, and one that handles physical aspects of the world. He calls this innate assumption that mind and matter are distinct "common-sense dualism". The body is for physical processes, like eating and moving, while the mind carries our consciousness in a separate - and separable - package. "We very naturally accept you can leave your body in a dream, or in astral projection or some sort of magic," Bloom says. "These are universal views."

There is plenty of evidence that thinking about disembodied minds comes naturally. People readily form relationships with non-existent others: roughly half of all 4-year-olds have had an imaginary friend, and adults often form and maintain relationships with dead relatives, fictional characters and fantasy partners. As Barrett points out, this is an evolutionarily useful skill. Without it we would be unable to maintain large social hierarchies and alliances or anticipate what an unseen enemy might be planning. "Requiring a body around to think about its mind would be a great liability," he says.

Useful as it is, common-sense dualism also appears to prime the brain for supernatural concepts such as life after death. In 2004, Jesse Bering of Queen's University Belfast, UK, put on a puppet show for a group of pre-school children. During the show, an alligator ate a mouse. The researchers then asked the children questions about the physical existence of the mouse, such as: "Can the mouse still be sick? Does it need to eat or drink?" The children said no. But when asked more "spiritual" questions, such as "does the mouse think and know things?" the children answered yes.

Default to god

Based on these and other experiments, Bering considers a belief in some form of life apart from that experienced in the body to be the default setting of the human brain. Education and experience teach us to override it, but it never truly leaves us, he says. From there it is only a short step to conceptualizing spirits, dead ancestors and, of course, gods, says Pascal Boyer, a psychologist at Washington University in St Louis, Missouri. Boyer points out that people expect their gods' minds to work very much like human minds, suggesting they spring from the same brain system that enables us to think about absent or non-existent people.

The ability to conceive of gods, however, is not sufficient to give rise to religion. The mind has another essential attribute: an overdeveloped sense of cause and effect which primes us to see purpose and design everywhere, even where there is none. "You see bushes rustle, you assume there's somebody or something there," Bloom says. This over-attribution of cause and effect probably evolved for survival. If there are predators around, it is no good spotting them 9 times out of 10. Running away when you don't have to is a small price to pay for avoiding danger when the threat is real.

Again, experiments on young children reveal this default state of the mind. Children as young as three readily attribute design and purpose to inanimate objects. When Deborah Kelemen of the

University of Arizona in Tucson asked 7 and 8-year-old children questions about inanimate objects and animals, she found that most believed they were created for a specific purpose. Pointy rocks are there for animals to scratch themselves on. Birds exist "to make nice music", while rivers exist so boats have something to float on. "It was extraordinary to hear children saying that things like mountains and clouds were 'for' a purpose and appearing highly resistant to any counter-suggestion," says Kelemen. In similar experiments, Olivera Petrovich of the University of Oxford asked pre-school children about the origins of natural things such as plants and animals. She found they were seven times as likely to answer that they were made by god as made by people.

These cognitive biases are so strong, says Petrovich that children tend to spontaneously invent the concept of god without adult intervention: "They rely on their everyday experience of the physical world and construct the concept of god on the basis of this experience." Because of this, when children hear the claims of religion they seem to make perfect sense.
Our predisposition to believe in a supernatural world stays with us as we get older. Kelemen has found that adults are just as inclined to see design and intention where there is none. Put under pressure to explain natural phenomena, adults often fall back on teleological arguments, such as "trees produce oxygen so that animals can breathe" or "the sun is hot because warmth nurtures life". Though she doesn't yet have evidence that this tendency is linked to belief in god, Kelemen does have results showing that most adults tacitly believe they have souls. Boyer is keen to point out that religious adults are not childish or weak-minded. Studies reveal that religious adults have very different mindsets from children, concentrating more on the moral dimensions of their faith and less on its supernatural attributes.

Even so, religion is an inescapable artefact of the wiring in our brain, says Bloom. "All humans possess the brain circuitry and that never goes away." Petrovich adds that even adults who describe themselves as atheists and agnostics are prone to supernatural thinking. Bering has seen this too. When one of his students carried out interviews with atheists, it became clear that they often tacitly attribute purpose to significant or traumatic moments in their lives, as if some agency were intervening to make it happen. "They don't completely exorcise the ghost of god - they just muzzle it," Bering says.

The fact that trauma is so often responsible for these slips gives a clue as to why adults find it so difficult to jettison their innate belief in gods, Atran says. The problem is something he calls "the tragedy of cognition". Humans can anticipate future events, remember the past and conceive of how things could go wrong - including their own death, which is hard to deal with. "You've got to figure out a solution, otherwise you're overwhelmed," Atran says. When natural brain processes give us a get-out-of-jail card, we take it.
That view is backed up by an experiment published late last year (*Science*, vol 322, p 115). Jennifer Whitson of the University of Texas in Austin and Adam Galinsky of Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, asked people what patterns they could see in arrangements of dots or stock market information. Before asking, Whitson and Galinsky made half their participants feel a lack of control, either by giving them feedback unrelated to their performance or by having them recall experiences where they had lost control of a situation.

The results were striking. The subjects who sensed a loss of control were much more likely to see patterns where there were none. "We were surprised that the phenomenon is as widespread as it is," Whitson says. What's going on, she suggests, is that when we feel a lack of control we fall

back on superstitious ways of thinking. That would explain why religions enjoy a revival during hard times.

So if religion is a natural consequence of how our brains work, where does that leave god? All the researchers involved stress that none of this says anything about the existence or otherwise of gods: as Barratt points out, whether or not a belief is true is independent of why people believe it. It does, however, suggests that god isn't going away, and that atheism will always be a hard sell. Religious belief is the "path of least resistance", says Boyer, while disbelief requires effort. These findings also challenge the idea that religion is an adaptation. "Yes, religion helps create large societies - and once you have large societies you can out compete groups that don't," Atran says. "But it arises as an artefact of the ability to build fictive worlds. I don't think there's an adaptation for religion any more than there's an adaptation to make airplanes." I don't think there's an adaptation for religion any more than there's an adaptation to make airplanes

Supporters of the adaptation hypothesis, however, say that the two ideas are not mutually exclusive. As David Sloan Wilson of Binghamton University in New York state points out, elements of religious belief could have arisen as a by-product of brain evolution, but religion per se was selected for because it promotes group survival. "Most adaptations are built from previous structures," he says. "Boyer's basic thesis and my basic thesis could both be correct."
Robin Dunbar of the University of Oxford - the researcher most strongly identified with the religion-as-adaptation argument - also has no problem with the idea that religion co-opts brain circuits that evolved for something else. Richard Dawkins, too, sees the two camps as compatible. "Why shouldn't both be correct?" he says. "I actually think they are."

Ultimately, discovering the true origins of something as complex as religion will be difficult. There is one experiment, however, that could go a long way to proving whether Boyer, Bloom and the rest are onto something profound. Ethical issues mean it won't be done any time soon, but that hasn't stopped people speculating about the outcome. It goes something like this. Left to their own devices, children create their own "creole" languages using hard-wired linguistic brain circuits. A similar experiment would provide our best test of the innate religious inclinations of humans. Would a group of children raised in isolation spontaneously create their own religious beliefs? "I think the answer is yes," says Bloom.

God of the gullible
In *The God Delusion*, Richard Dawkins argues that religion is propagated through indoctrination, especially of children. Evolution predisposes children to swallow whatever their parents and tribal elders tell them, he argues, as trusting obedience is valuable for survival. This also leads to what Dawkins calls "slavish gullibility" in the face of religious claims.

If children have an innate belief in god, however, where does that leave the indoctrination hypothesis? "I am thoroughly happy with believing that children are predisposed to believe in invisible gods - I always was," says Dawkins. "But I also find the indoctrination hypothesis plausible. The two influences could, and I suspect do, reinforce one another." He suggests that evolved gullibility converts a child's general predisposition to believe in god into a specific belief in the god (or gods) their parents worship.

Courtesy: *New Scientist*

An Official Journal of Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samitee, India

THOUGHT & ACTION

Committed to Build Rationalist Society

Issue 3 Vol. 11

Oct-Dec 2011

In this issue....

2.	Is Bhoomi Puja by State a Secular Act?	*Ram Puniyani*
4.	When Corruption is Viewed Fuzzily	*Arundhati Roy*
6.	Quacks & Quakes	*Donald Prothero*
9.	Drugs and the Meaning of Life	*Sam Harris*
16.	MPs and Bribery	*RA Jahagirdar*
21.	Treasure of Faith:	*Ram Puniyani*
23.	Seeing God in tsunamis and everyday events	*Jesse Bering*
28.	Wide-Ranging Questions about India	*Prabhakar Nanawaty*
31.	Why do the ANS Oppose Only Hindu Religion?	*Dr. Narendra Dabholkar*

Founder
Dr. Narendra Dabholkar

Editorial board:
PK Nanawaty
TB Khilare
Ms Suman oak

Correspondence:
email: pkn.ans@gmail.com

Is Bhoomi Puja by State a Secular Act?

Ram Puniyani

It is a common sight to see the statues, photos and symbols of Hindu Gods and Goddesses in different Government owned public places like police station and other buildings. Similarly state run buses also have the photos of Hindu Gods and Godesses. We have stopped thinking whether it is right. It is a common observation that most of the time Hindu rituals are performed while the construction of state projects, buildings etc are undertaken. The practice has become a sort of routine to which not many people give a thought. We remember that after independence serious scholars criticized the government for not being secular enough. Around that time when Pundit Nehru was the Prime Minister, the Central Cabinet not only turned down the proposal of building Somanth temple with state money but Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the then President was also advised not to inaugurate the temple in his capacity as the President of India. The visits of public functionaries to the holy places were a strictly private matter, away form the glare of media.

Times seem to have been changing. The politicians are competing with each other to seek the divine blessing through different well advertised visits, the inaugural ceremonies of state sponsored buildings have the Brahmin priest supervising laying of the foundation stone and undertaking a bhoomi puja (Worship of Earth) and doing his best to get the approval of the supernatural powers though the chanting of Mantras. In this scenario, the move by Rajesh Solanki, a dalit activist from Gujarat to file a Public Interest Litigation against the bhoomi pujan and chanting of mantras performed at the time of foundation stone laying ceremony for the new building for the High court, came as a move to set the things on secular grounds. The function was performed in the presence of the Governor of the State of Gujarat and the Chief Justice of the State amongst others. Solanki's plea was that a secular state should not perform the religious rituals. Such an act of worship violates the basic principles of the Indian Constitution, which is secular and lays the boundaries between the state and the religion. Solanki argued that the puja and chanting of mantras by Brahmin priests would make the judiciary loose its secular credentials.

Rather than upholding his rational and secular plea, the court went on to dismiss the petition and also fined the petitioner Rs 20000, doubting his bona fides. The judges went onto say that the Bhoomi puja is meant to seek the pardon of the Earth to graciously bear the burden of the damage to make the construction, to make the construction successful. And

since this is for the welfare of all it fits into the Hindu values of Vasudhaiva Kutumbkam (All beings on the planet are one family) and Sarvajan Sukhino Bhavantu (For the good of all).

There is a lot of mix up in different arguments being put forward. To begin with to regard that for making a construction the Earth has to be worshipped is a purely Hindu concept. The people from other religions will do different things to start their construction work, like sprinkling Holy water by Christian priest for example. The atheists will be more concerned about the preservation of ecological balance and to see that the geological and architectural aspects have been fully taken care of. The legal defense of the practices of one religion for state function is nothing short of violating the basic principles of Indian Constitution, which ensures that state keep its distance from all religions and then treats them all on the equal ground, reaffirmed in S. R. Bommai case. Secularism, as understood in S.R. Bommai is that (1) the state has no religion (2) the state stands aloof from religion and (3) the state does not promote or identify with any religion.

. It is true that moral values of many religions can be accepted by the society at large, like Vasudhaiva Kutumbkam (Hinduism), or 'all men are brother' (Islam) or 'Love thy neighbor' (Christianity) but as far as rituals are concerned it is a different cup of tea. The core of religions is not rituals but moral values. In popular perception and practices it is the rituals which are identified with the religion. This is a matter of social understudying and different streams will go by different opinion on this. The core point is that the saints of the genre of Kabir, Nizamuddin Auliya, and Gandhi harped on the moral aspects of the religions. As far as practice of religion is concerned people have no restriction in following their social and personal practices, which are so diverse between different religions and even within the same religion as different sects follow different religious practices.

Such a judgment goes totally against the Article 51 (A) of the Constitution also, which directs us to promote the rational thought in the society. The promotion of rituals of one particular faith by the State is against the spirit of our Constitution. Again in many instances there is just a thin borderline between faith and blind faith. Blind faith will push the society in the retrograde direction. Today we know that unless the location for a construction is selected properly, geological and construction aspects are taken care of scientifically, accidents do happen. That's why state has developed many a norms of construction which are necessary to be cleared and we have witnessed that violation of such norms have led to accidents. Our courts have to promote these aspects of Constitution rather than to prove in a convoluted way that practices of one religion should be accepted as the state practices. Father of the Nation Mahatma Gandhi had gone on to state that "In India, for whose fashioning I have worked all my life, every man enjoys equality of status, whatever his religion is. The

state is bound to be wholly Secular" (Harijan August 31, 1947) and, "religion is not the test of nationality but is a personal matter between man and God, (ibid pg 90), and," religion is a personal affair of each Individual, it must not be mixed up with politics or national Affairs"(ibid pg 90).

Last few decades identification of Hindu religious practices has been accepted as the state norms and this needs to be given a rethinking.

■

When Corruption is Viewed Fuzzily

Arundhati Roy

We are here, all of us, because like many others in this country we are concerned about the rampant corruption that is hollowing out the institutions of our democracy. Twenty years ago, when the era of "liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation" descended on us, we were told that public sector units and public infrastructure needed to be privatized because they were corrupt and inefficient.

We were told the problem was systemic. Now that nearly everything has been privatised, when our rivers, mountains, forests, minerals, water supply, electricity and communications systems have been sold to private corporations, we find that corruption has grown exponentially, the growth rate of corruption has surpassed everything we could possibly imagine. In scam after scam, the figures that are being siphoned away are completely off the charts. It is not surprising that this has enraged the people of this country. But that anger does not always show signs of being accompanied by clear thinking. Among the millions of understandably furious people who thronged to Jantar Mantar to support Anna Hazare and his team, corruption was presented as a moral issue, not a political one, or a systemic one — not as a symptom of the disease but the disease itself. There were no calls to change or dismantle a system that was causing the corruption.

Perhaps this was not surprising because many of those middle-class people who flocked to Jantar Mantar and much of the corporate-sponsored media who broadcast the gathering, calling it a "revolution" — India's Tahrir Square — had benefited greatly from the economic reforms that have led to corruption on this scale. (The same media has in the past ignored rallies of hundreds of thousands of poor people who have gathered in Delhi in the past because their demands did not suit the corporate agenda). It was not surprising then, that several corporate CEOs generously donated lakhs of rupees to support the campaign, cellphone companies weighed in with free SMS messages — here was their chance to undo

the beating the public image of the corporate sector and corporate media had taken when the 2G scam hit the news.

When corruption is viewed fuzzily, as just a touchy-feely "moral" problem then everybody can happily rally to the cause — fascists, democrats, anarchists, godsquadders, day-trippers, the right, the left and even the deeply corrupt, who are usually the most enthusiastic demonstrators. It's a pot that is easy to make but much easier to break. Anna Hazare threw the first stone at his own pot when he shocked his supporters from the left by rolling Narendra Modi onto centre-stage, in his "Development Chief Minister" clothes. Leaving aside the debate on Modi's extremely dubious achievements in the field of "development" — many of us were left to wonder whether we were being offered a supposedly incorruptible fascist as an alternative to hopelessly corrupt supposed democrats.

I am not against having a strong anticorruption body, though I would like to be reassured that it in itself does not become an unaccountable, undemocratic institution accruing great powers to itself. However I do not believe that we can fight communal fascism or economic totalitarianism (that has led to us having more than 800 million people in this country living on less than 20 rupees a day) with only legal measures.

As long as we have these economic policies in place, the National Employment Guarantee Act will never be able to do away with hunger and malnutrition, anti-corruption laws will not do away with injustice, and criminal laws will not do away with communal fascism, the twin sibling of economic totalitarianism. They will, at best, be mitigating measures. As the historian Howard Zinn said "the rule of law does not do away with the unequal distribution of wealth and power, but reinforces that inequality with the authority of law. It allocates wealth and power in such complicated and indirect ways as to leave the victim bewildered."

Will the Right to Information Bill or the Jan Lokpal Bill force the government to disclose the secret MoUs with private corporations it has signed in Orissa, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand for which it is prepared to wage war against its poorest citizens? If they do, then these MoUs will disclose the fact that the government is selling the country's minerals to private corporations for a pittance, a small royalty. It's not corruption. It's completely above board, it's legal plunder which is more scandalous, and has economic, environmental and human costs that will outstrip the 2G scam several times over. If we do get the information, what will we do with it? I do believe that if anyone present at the "revolution" at Jantar Mantar had raised the question of the secret MoUs, the adoring TV coverage and a good proportion of the crowd would have disappeared very quickly.

The lawyer Prashant Bhushan who is on the drafting committee for the Jan Lokpal Bill understands all of this very clearly. In his years as a public interest litigation lawyer he has consistently represented mass movements as well as individuals who have been fighting these policies with their backs to the wall. He is the counsel in the PIL in the 2G scam in which Tata and Reliance, the biggest corporations in the country, along with their allies in the government and the media, have been badly exposed.

Yesterday in court he asked why only the paid employees of these corporations were being arrested and not their proprietors. Such a man must be targeted, taken down, right? The viciousness of the smear campaign against him is proof of the threat he poses to vested interests. I have known Prashant Bhushan for years. First as a comrade and now as a close friend. We may disagree about some things, but I would vouch for his integrity anytime, anywhere. He is acutely aware of his family's social and economic privilege. Even more so of the fact that that most of that privilege is derived from his father to whom is he is very close, but with whom he has major ideological differences. Like many of us who are privileged compared to the majority of the people in this country (some of us by birth, caste, race, gender, and/or by virtue of writing a best-selling novel), Prashant had to decide what to do with that privilege. He chose to use his training as a lawyer to create as much space as possible for those against whom the Powers are arraigned. This is why he has been at the barricades of almost every issue of social justice that is being fought in this country. This is what has been turned against him. And this is why he is being hunted down.

In a filthy battle such as this one, in which facts are made up, none of us can ever be pure enough or righteous enough. None of us can hope to emerge untainted. However, the fight will continue. Retreat is not an option.

Courtesy: *Secular Action Network, May 2011*

■

Quacks & Quakes

Donald Prothero

The great Sendai earthquake and tsunami of March 11, 2011, generated not only huge coverage in all the media, but also brought all the crazies out of the woodwork (as any major earthquake or natural disaster does). I've discussed the geophysical and geological details in a separate post, but the storm of misinformation and myths flying around the media and internet was overwhelming. My email box was filled questions about these events, because

I've been doing publicity for my new book *Catastrophes: Earthquakes, Tsunamis, Tornadoes, and other Earth-Shattering Disasters* (Johns Hopkins University Press). There were not only the usual myths about earthquakes, but also an additional layer of apocalyptic speculation and "end of the world" prophecies, plus the crazies who believe the 2012 myth.

Among those that got their 15 minutes of fame during the post-quake media blitz was a well-known crank, Jim Berkland, who got a full interview promoting his ideas on Fox News on March 17 (but on no other network). First, the reporter put up a map of the "Ring of Fire" of volcanoes and earthquakes around the Pacific Rim, pointed at Chile, then New Zealand, then Japan, and implied that this circle of quakes might end in California. Apparently, he never consulted a geologist, who would have pointed out that each of those regions is an entirely different type of plate boundary and they have no tectonic plates in common. Then Fox gave Berkland a full five minutes to spout his ideas, with the same credulous reporter tossing him softball questions, and no rebuttal from any other geologist or seismologist. Berkland rambled on about animal behavior and fish die-offs in California (which have been explained by unusual water conditions), never mentioning that such die-offs are common and not statistically associated with earthquakes (nor is there any plausible mechanism that might link them). He blathered on about how animals sense unusual magnetic fields before the quake, an argument that has been thoroughly debunked. Berkland mentions several other quakes he claims to have "predicted," with no fact-checking or examination of his overall record of "prediction." He also demonstrated the classic persecution complex of all cranks and fringe scientists, dismissing real scientists and their "black boxes" when he uses methods with no rigor or peer review. He then used his airtime to boldly predict that a great California quake would happen on March 19, the perigee of the "supermoon," with a prediction window running to March 26. Well, those dates have come and gone, and we don't see Fox News interviewing him again to explain what went wrong.

If Fox had bothered to do minimal research about him, they would never have wasted the airtime and panicked people unnecessarily. First of all, Berkland is not a seismologist but a geologist with only a B.A. and some graduate training, who served in several different government positions before retiring in 1994. Berkland is touted as having predicted the Loma Prieta earthquake, something that he uses as his main publicity hook and was promoted on the Fox broadcast. However, there are questions about this prediction. That region had already been targeted a year earlier as a "seismic gap" or one of the most likely areas for the next big quake. According to the University of Washington Pacific Northwest Seismic Network site, "The segment of the San Andreas fault that broke in the 1989 M 7.1 Loma Prieta or "World Series" earthquake had been identified by the USGS as one of the more

likely segments of the San Andreas to rupture. Magnitude 5+ earthquakes 2 and 15 months before the damaging earthquake were treated as possible foreshocks, and the USGS issued 5-day Public Advisories through the California Office of Emergency Services." So it was no great shakes to follow this prediction and pick a date. Berkland just got lucky and happened to mention it to a reporter for a local paper in Gilroy, California, so it was actually recorded in the public record.

Once his complete record of quake prediction is examined more closely, its "success rate" falls apart. It's a classic case of cherry-picking the favorable data, and also confirmation bias, used by fortune-tellers and faith healers and swindlers of every kind for centuries: people remember the hits and forget the misses. Berkland got one lucky "hit" and most people never bother to check his overall track record. Seismologist Roger Hunter did a careful statistical study, published in the *Skeptical Inquirer*, and found that his "predictions" were no better than chance.[1] Berkland's claim is that when the tidal forces of the alignment of the moon and sun are at a maximum (a *syzygy*, as he calls it), they can exert a pull on the earth's crust and trigger earthquakes. This idea goes back to at least 1897, and has some plausibility, since the tidal attraction does exert some force on the earth's crust. However, when geophysicists at the UCLA Institute for Geophysics and Planetary Physics conducted a rigorous study, they found no statistical relationship between the two.[2] Several other studies have also tested the connections between tides and earthquakes, and found no statistically significant correlations.[3] The only possible correlation might occur when tidal forces pull on shallow thrust faults but the faults in Berkland's March 19 prediction for California are all deep vertical strike-slip faults, none with the type of motion that fit the shallow thrust-fault model. The fault that caused the Sendai quake is a deep subduction zone, not a shallow thrust. The only other possible place where tides might affect quakes is in the rift valleys of mid-ocean ridges, miles under the middle of the ocean,[4] and far from the areas that Berkland has focused his predictions.

In addition to Berkland's questionable methods and lack of consistent success in prediction based on tides, he also uses animal behavior as a guide to predicting earthquakes. His "highly rigorous" method is to survey the newspaper for an unusual number of lost dog and cat reports in the classified ads section. The idea that animals can predict earthquakes has been carefully analyzed and has failed the test again and again. Animals may be more sensitive than humans to the P-waves, which are the fastest seismic waves and arrive several seconds before the destructive S-waves in regions far from the epicenter—but this gives warnings of only a few seconds in any place that is likely to experience strong shaking. If animals are sensitive to other disturbances in the earth's crust that happen more than a few

seconds before the quake itself, it has never been reliably corroborated. In addition, this method runs into the same problem that most short-term earthquake prediction methods have encountered: no two earthquakes are alike. Some have precursors, and others don't. Thus, if animals did act strangely before a particular quake occurred (just as some geophysical precursors have been observed on some quakes), there is no evidence that they reliably predict most quakes (just as many quakes don't have precursors).

This leads to the bigger issue: the best geophysicists in the world have been working hard on short-term earthquake prediction for decades, but most would concede that we are not much closer than we were fifty years ago. We are very successful at giving long-term warnings of months to years in advance for regions that are overdue for a big quake ("seismic gaps") and these predictions have worked reliably. But short-term prediction has always floundered on the maddening problem that no two faults behave in the same way. Back in the 1970s, dilatancy theory about ground deformation found a series of precursors, and led to the successful prediction of the Feb. 4, 1975, Haicheng quake in China. But just 17 months later, there were no precursors for the July 28, 1976, Tangshan earthquake, and about half a million people died. Since this failure, seismologists have become much more cautious about short-term earthquake prediction. Most will candidly admit that there will probably never be a reliable method of short-term prediction. This leaves room for quacks like Jim Berkland to step in, brag about his questionable Loma Prieta "prediction," and get free media attention. Then he can rely on the fact that reporters these days do no research into his background, nor do they confront him after each failed prediction to ask him what went wrong. As Charles Richter himself said, "Only fools, liars, and charlatans predict earthquakes." You can be the judge of which category best fits Berkland.

■

Drugs and the Meaning of Life

Sam Harris

Everything we do is for the purpose of altering consciousness. We form friendships so that we can feel certain emotions, like love, and avoid others, like loneliness. We eat specific foods to enjoy their fleeting presence on our tongues. We read for the pleasure of thinking another person's thoughts. Every waking moment—and even in our dreams—we struggle to direct the flow of sensation, emotion, and cognition toward states of consciousness that we value.

Drugs are another means toward this end. Some are illegal; some are stigmatized; some are dangerous—though, perversely, these sets only partially intersect. There are drugs of extraordinary power and utility, like psilocybin (the active compound in "magic mushrooms") and lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), which pose no apparent risk of addiction and are physically well-tolerated, and yet one can still be sent to prison for their use—while drugs like tobacco and alcohol, which have ruined countless lives, are enjoyed ad libitum in almost every society on earth. There are other points on this continuum—methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA or "Ecstasy") has remarkable therapeutic potential, but it is also susceptible to abuse, and it appears to be neurotoxic.

One of the great responsibilities we have as a society is to educate ourselves, along with the next generation, about which substances are worth ingesting, and for what purpose, and which are not. The problem, however, is that we refer to all biologically active compounds by a single term—"drugs"—and this makes it nearly impossible to have an intelligent discussion about the psychological, medical, ethical, and legal issues surrounding their use. The poverty of our language has been only slightly eased by the introduction of terms like "psychedelics" to differentiate certain visionary compounds, which can produce extraordinary states of ecstasy and insight, from "narcotics" and other classic agents of stupefaction and abuse.

Drug abuse and addiction are real problems, of course—the remedy for which is education and medical treatment, not incarceration. In fact, the worst drugs of abuse in the United States now appear to be prescription painkillers, like oxycodone. Should these medicines be made illegal? Of course not. People need to be informed about them, and addicts need treatment. And all drugs—including alcohol, cigarettes, and aspirin—must be kept out of the hands of children.

I discuss issues of drug policy in some detail in my first book, The End of Faith (pp. 158-164), and my thinking on the subject has not changed. The "war on drugs" has been well lost, and should never have been waged. While it isn't explicitly protected by the U.S. Constitution, I can think of no political right more fundamental than the right to peacefully steward the contents of one's own consciousness. The fact that we pointlessly ruin the lives of nonviolent drug users by incarcerating them, at enormous expense, constitutes one of the great moral failures of our time. (And the fact that we make room for them in our prisons by paroling murderers and rapists makes one wonder whether civilization isn't simply doomed.)

I have a daughter who will one day take drugs. Of course, I will do everything in my power to see that she chooses her drugs wisely, but a life without drugs is neither foreseeable, nor, I think, desirable. Someday, I hope she enjoys a morning cup of tea or coffee as much as

I do. If my daughter drinks alcohol as an adult, as she probably will, I will encourage her to do it safely. If she chooses to smoke marijuana, I will urge moderation. Tobacco should be shunned, of course, and I will do everything within the bounds of decent parenting to steer her away from it. Needless to say, if I knew my daughter would eventually develop a fondness for methamphetamine or crack cocaine, I might never sleep again. But if she does not try a psychedelic like psilocybin or LSD at least once in her adult life, I will worry that she may have missed one of the most important rites of passage a human being can experience.

This is not to say that everyone should take psychedelics. As I will make clear below, these drugs pose certain dangers. Undoubtedly, there are people who cannot afford to give the anchor of sanity even the slightest tug. It has been many years since I have taken psychedelics, in fact, and my abstinence is borne of a healthy respect for the risks involved. However, there was a period in my early 20's when I found drugs like psilocybin and LSD to be indispensable tools of insight, and some of the most important hours of my life were spent under their influence. I think it quite possible that I might never have discovered that there was an inner landscape of mind worth exploring without having first pressed this pharmacological advantage.

While human beings have ingested plant-based psychedelics for millennia, scientific research on these compounds did not begin until the 1950's. By 1965, a thousand studies had been published, primarily on psilocybin and LSD, many of which attested to the usefulness of psychedelics in the treatment of clinical depression, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), alcohol addiction, and the pain and anxiety associated with terminal cancer. Within a few years, however, this entire field of research was abolished in an effort to stem the spread of these drugs among the general public. After a hiatus that lasted an entire generation, scientific research on the pharmacology and therapeutic value of psychedelics has quietly resumed.

The psychedelics include chemicals like psilocybin, LSD, DMT, and mescaline—all of which powerfully alter cognition, perception, and mood. Most seem to exert their influence through the serotonin system in the brain, primarily by binding to 5-HT2A receptors (though several have affinity for other receptors as well), leading to increased neuronal activity in prefrontal cortex (PFC). While the PFC in turn modulates subcortical dopamine production, the effect of psychedelics appears to take place largely outside dopamine pathways (which might explain why these drugs are not habit forming).

The mere existence of psychedelics would seem to establish the material basis of mental and spiritual life beyond any doubt—for the introduction of these substances into the brain is the obvious cause of any numinous apocalypse that follows. It is possible, however, if

not actually plausible, to seize this datum from the other end and argue, and Aldous Huxley did in his classic essay, The Doors of Perception, that the primary function of the brain could be eliminative: its purpose could be to prevent some vast, transpersonal dimension of mind from flooding consciousness, thereby allowing apes like ourselves to make their way in the world without being dazzled at every step by visionary phenomena irrelevant to their survival. Huxley thought that if the brain were a kind of "reducing valve" for "Mind at Large," this would explain the efficacy of psychedelics: They could simply be a material means of opening the tap.

Unfortunately, Huxley was operating under the erroneous assumption that psychedelics decrease brain activity. However, modern techniques of neuro-imaging have shown that these drugs tend to increase activity in many regions of the cortex (and in subcortical structures as well). Still, the action of these drugs does not rule out dualism, or the existence of realms of mind beyond the brain—but then nothing does. This is one of the problems with views of this kind: They appear to be unfalsifiable.

Of course, the brain does filter an extraordinary amount of information from consciousness. And, like many who have taken these drugs, I can attest that psychedelics certainly throw open the gates. Needless to say, positing the existence of a "Mind at Large" is more tempting in some states of consciousness than in others. And the question of which view of reality we should privilege is, at times, worth considering. But these drugs can also produce mental states that are best viewed in clinical terms as forms of psychosis. As a general matter, I believe we should be very slow to make conclusions about the nature of the cosmos based upon inner experience — no matter how profound these experiences seem.

However, there is no question that the mind is vaster and more fluid than our ordinary, waking consciousness suggests. Consequently, it is impossible to communicate the profundity (or seeming profundity) of psychedelic states to those who have never had such experiences themselves. It is, in fact, difficult to remind oneself of the power of these states once they have passed.

Many people wonder about the difference between meditation (and other contemplative practices) and psychedelics. Are these drugs a form of cheating, or are they the one, indispensable vehicle for authentic awakening? They are neither. Many people don't realize that all psychoactive drugs modulate the existing neurochemistry of the brain—either by mimicking specific neurotransmitters or by causing the neurotransmitters themselves to be more active. There is nothing that one can experience on a drug that is not, at some level, an expression of the brain's potential. Hence, whatever one has experienced after ingesting a drug like LSD is likely to have been experienced, by someone, somewhere, without it.

However, it cannot be denied that psychedelics are a uniquely potent means of altering consciousness. If a person learns to meditate, pray, chant, do yoga, etc., there is no guarantee that anything will happen. Depending on his aptitude, interest, etc., boredom could be the only reward for his efforts. If, however, a person ingests 100 micrograms of LSD, what will happen next will depend on a variety of factors, but there is absolutely no question that something will happen. And boredom is simply not in the cards. Within the hour, the significance of his existence will bear down upon our hero like an avalanche. As Terence McKenna never tired of pointing out, this guarantee of profound effect, for better or worse, is what separates psychedelics from every other method of spiritual inquiry. It is, however, a difference that brings with it certain liabilities.

Ingesting a powerful dose of a psychedelic drug is like strapping oneself to a rocket without a guidance system. One might wind up somewhere worth going—and, depending on the compound and one's "set and setting," certain trajectories are more likely than others. But however methodically one prepares for the voyage, one can still be hurled into states of mind so painful and confusing as to be indistinguishable from psychosis. Hence, the terms "psychotomimetic" and "psychotogenic" that are occasionally applied to these drugs.

I have visited both extremes on the psychedelic continuum. The positive experiences were more sublime than I could have ever imagined or than I can now faithfully recall. These chemicals disclose layers of beauty that art is powerless to capture and for which the beauty of Nature herself is a mere simulacrum. It is one thing to be awestruck by the sight of a giant redwood and to be amazed at the details of its history and underlying biology. It is quite another to spend an apparent eternity in egoless communion with it. Positive psychedelic experiences often reveal how wondrously at ease in the universe a human being can be—and for most of us, normal waking consciousness does not offer so much as a glimmer of these deeper possibilities.

People generally come away from such experiences with a sense that our conventional states of consciousness obscure and truncate insights and emotions that are sacred. If the patriarchs and matriarchs of the world's religions experienced such states of mind, many of their claims about the nature of reality can make subjective sense. The beautific vision does not tell you anything about the birth of the cosmos—but it does reveal how utterly transfigured a mind can be by a full collision with the present moment.

But as the peaks are high, the valleys are deep. My "bad trips" were, without question, the most harrowing hours I have ever suffered—and they make the notion of hell, as a metaphor if not a destination, seem perfectly apt. If nothing else, these excruciating

experiences can become a source of compassion. I think it would be impossible to have any sense of what it is like to suffer from mental illness without having briefly touched its shores.

At both ends of the continuum time dilates in ways that cannot be described—apart from saying that these experiences can seem eternal. I have had sessions, both positive and negative, in which any knowledge that I had ingested a drug had been entirely extinguished, and all memories of my past along with it. Full immersion in the present moment, to this degree, is synonymous with the feeling that one has always been, and will always be, in precisely this condition. Depending on the character of one's experience at that point, notions of salvation and damnation do not seem hyperbolic. In my experience, Blake's line about beholding "eternity in an hour" neither promises, nor threatens, too much.

In the beginning, my experiences with psilocybin and LSD were so positive that I could not believe a bad trip was possible. Notions of "set and setting," admittedly vague, seemed sufficient to account for this. My mental set was exactly as it needed to be—I was a spiritually serious investigator of my own mind—and my setting was generally one of either natural beauty or secure solitude.

I cannot account for why my adventures with psychedelics were uniformly pleasant until they weren't—but when the doors to hell finally opened, they appear to have been left permanently ajar. Thereafter, whether or not a trip was good in the aggregate, it generally entailed some harrowing detour on the path to sublimity. Have you ever traveled, beyond all mere metaphors, to the Mountain of Shame and stayed for a thousand years? I do not recommend it.

On my first trip to Nepal, I took a rowboat out on Phewa Lake in Pokhara, which offers a stunning view of the Annapurna range. It was early morning, and I was alone. As the sun rose over the water, I ingested 400 micrograms of LSD. I was 20 years old and had taken the drug at least ten times previously. What could go wrong?

Everything, as it turns out. Well, not everything—I didn't drown. And I have a vague memory of drifting ashore and of being surrounded by a group of Nepali soldiers. After watching me for a while, as I ogled them over the gunwale like a lunatic, they seemed on the verge of deciding what to do with me. Some polite words of Esperanto, and a few, mad oar strokes, and I was off shore and into oblivion. So I suppose that could have ended differently.

But soon there was no lake or mountains or boat—and if I had fallen into the water I am pretty sure there would have been no one to swim. For the next several hours my mind became the perfect instrument of self-torture. All that remained was a continuous shattering and terror for which I have no words.

These encounters take something out of you. Even if drugs like LSD are biologically safe, the potential for extremely unpleasant and destabilizing experiences presents its own risks. I believe I was positively affected for weeks and months by my good trips, and negatively affected by the bad ones. Given these roulette-like odds, one can only recommend these experiences with caution.

While meditation can open the mind to a similar range of conscious states, they are reached far less haphazardly. If LSD is like being strapped to rocket, learning to meditate is like gently raising a sail. Yes, it is possible, even with guidance, to wind up someplace terrifying—and there are people who probably shouldn't spend long periods in intensive practice. But the general effect of meditation training is of settling ever more fully into one's own skin, and suffering less, rather than more there.

As I discussed in *The End of Faith*, I view most psychedelic experiences as potentially misleading. Psychedelics do not guarantee wisdom. They merely guarantee more content. And visionary experiences, considered in their totality, appear to me to be ethically neutral. Therefore, it seems that psychedelic ecstasy must be steered toward our personal and collective well-being by some other principle. As Daniel Pinchbeck pointed out in his highly entertaining book, Breaking Open the Head, the fact that both the Mayans and the Aztecs used psychedelics, while being enthusiastic practitioners of human sacrifice, makes any idealistic link between plant-based shamanism and an enlightened society seem terribly naive.

As I will discuss in future essays, the form of transcendence that appears to link directly to ethical behavior and human well-being is the transcendence of egoity in the midst of ordinary waking consciousness. It is by ceasing to cling to the contents of consciousness—to our thoughts, moods, desires, etc.—that we make progress. Such a project does not, in principle, require that we experience more contents. The freedom from self that is both the goal and foundation of "spiritual" life is coincident with normal perception and cognition—though, admittedly, this can be difficult to realize.

The power of psychedelics, however, is that they often reveal, in the span of a few hours, depths of awe and understanding that can otherwise elude us for a lifetime. As is often the case, William James said it about as well as words permit:

One conclusion was forced upon my mind at that time, and my impression of its truth has ever since remained unshaken. It is that our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different. We may go through life without suspecting their existence; but apply the requisite stimulus,

and at a touch they are there in all their completeness, definite types of mentality which probably somewhere have their field of application and adaptation. No account of the universe in its totality can be final which leaves these other forms of consciousness quite disregarded. How to regard them is the question,—for they are so discontinuous with ordinary consciousness. Yet they may determine attitudes though they cannot furnish formulas, and open a region though they fail to give a map. At any rate, they forbid a premature closing of our accounts with reality.

■

MPs and Bribery

RA Jahagirdar

Among the Countries that shook off the colonial rule and became independent after the Second World War, India is the only country which has retained democratic regime consistently throughout. The rule of law, as provided in the Constitution of India, has been sustained. Even the eighteen months' emergency of 1975-77 was at least technically in accordance with law — so said the Supreme Court of India. Elections have been held regularly in accordance with the Constitution and law.

Lok Sabha - right up to the 18th Lok Sabha — have been elected regularly and no Lok Sabha has been dissolved except as provided by law. Unlike in Pakistan, where no Government has been removed by a decision of the incumbent Government or by a vote in the Parliament, in India no government has been 'thrown out.'

All this continuity in India has been made possible not merely by the Constitution (several countries which went under dictatorships had also constitutions) but by the strength of Indian democracy, which is reflected through the people's will in the Indian Parliament. The Parliament of India is the largest democratic parliament in the world. The people of India, through the Constituent Assembly placed the most unlimited trust in the Houses of Parliament and gave both the Houses great powers and privileges, to enable them to discharge the legislative functions without hindrance or interference. The uncodified privileges of the Indian Parliament are as wide as the privileges of the British House of Commons. Apart from the exclusion of jurisdiction of any court to question the validity of the procedure and proceedings in the Parliament, which is provided for in Article 122 of the Constitution, there is a total immunity to a Member of Parliament in respect of anything said

or any vote given by him in the Parliament. The relevant provision viz. Article 105(2) deserves quotation,

"No Member of Parliament shall be liable to any proceedings in any court in respect of anything said or any vote given by him in Parliament or any committee thereof…"

The protection given to the legislators was to enable them to discharge their duties without fear or favour or hope of favour. The assumption underlying this provision, as other provisions relating to duties, is that the person charged with duty and endowed with the power to perform this duty will perform that duty and exercise that power honestly and in good faith, though not always wisely and well. Exercise of that power by a legislator for personal gain is wholly inconsistent with the majestic status of the Parliament under our Constitution and also with the sacred duty of the legislator in whom the voters have placed trust. To act knowingly dishonestly is obviously to commit breach of trust. But it is not a criminal breach of trust nor is it an offence otherwise punishable — so says the Supreme Court of India.

The question that the Supreme Court had to consider was whether a Member of Parliament accepting bribe to vote on a resolution in the Parliament as per the bribe giver's wish is liable to punishment in accordance with law relating to bribery and corruption. The Supreme Court said: "No." Some Members of the 10th Lok Sabha, owing allegiance to Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, were alleged to have accepted money to vote against a resolution expressing no confidence in the Government headed by P.V. Narasinha Rao. The no confidence motion moved on July 26, 1993 was defeated on July 28, 1993. The alleged acceptance of money by the Members of Parliament was patently consideration other than legal remuneration. That they were public servants was not disputable. The case was thus clearly covered by the penal provisions of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988. If the charges held were proved in the trial, these Members of the Parliament would be convicted. Under the law, the bribe givers (P.V. Narasinha Rao was among them) would also be guilty of a criminal offence.

The prosecution launched by the Central Bureau of Investigation was challenged by both the bribe givers and bribe takers and this challenge ultimately landed in the Supreme Court of India. The Bench, which heard this case consisted of five judges — Justices S.C. Agarwal, G.N. Ray, A.S. Anand, S.P. Bharucha and S. Rajendra Babu. The bench by a majority of 3 (S.P. Bharucha, S. Rajendra Babu and G.N. Ray) held that in view of the provisions contained in Article 105(2) of the Constitution, the bribed members of Parliament

enjoyed immunity from prosecution because, said the learned three judges, having regard to 'in respect of' in Article 105(2), it must be held that the said provision protects a Member of Parliament against proceedings in Court that relate to or concern or have a connection or nexus with anything said or vote given by him in Parliament. The judgment of the Supreme Court is reported in (1998) 4 SCC 626 under the title P.V. Narasinha Rao v. State.

The reasoning in the judgment of the majority was that the charge against the alleged bribe takers was that they "were party to a criminal conspiracy and agreed to or entered into an agreement with" the alleged bribe givers "to defeat the no confidence motion ... by illegal means viz, to obtain or agree to obtain gratification other than legal remunerations" from the alleged bribe givers "as a motive or reward for defeating the no confidence motion". In pursuance of this conspiracy the alleged bribe givers "passed on several lakhs of rupees" to the alleged bribe takers and the same amounts were accepted by the latter. The stated object of the agreement was to defeat the vote of no confidence (by the bribe takers voting against it). The moneys taken were "as a motive or reward for defeating" the no confidence motion. "The nexus between the alleged conspiracy and bribe and the no confidence motion is explicit."

The learned judges were no doubt indignant at what the bribed legislators did, for they said, "Of course the offence that the alleged bribe-takers are said to have committed is serious and if true, they bartered a most solemn trust committed to them by those whom they represented. By reason of the lucre that they received, they enabled a Government to survive." (Without this crime, the Government would have fallen). The learned judges said, "Court's sense of indignation should not lead it to construe the Constitution narrowly, impairing the guarantee to effective parliamentary participation and debate." How does a bribe enable a legislator to effectively participate in the proceedings? How does a refusal to be bribed prevent a legislator from voting honestly?

Does the prosecution for taking bribe to vote in a particular manner, amount to prosecution for "any vote given by him in Parliament?" Alas, the majority judgment does not deal with these questions satisfactorily. The majority judgment in P.V. Narasinha Rao case has done as much damage to parliamentary democracy as the majority judgment in ADM Jabalpur v. Shukla (AIR 1976 SC 1207) did to the concept of rule of law in this country. The majority (of one) judgment in ADM Jabalpur is now acknowledged as laying down a rational interpretation. If a situation similar to the one in P.V. Narasinha Rao's arises (one hopes it will not arise), it is hoped, a view similar to the one adopted by the majority will not be taken.

The following from the minority judgment illustrates the damage done by the majority judgment:

"*An interpretation of the provisions of Article 105(2) which would enable a member of Parliament to claim immunity from prosecutions in a criminal court for an offence of bribery in connection with anything said by him in Parliament or any committee thereof and thereby place such Members above the law would not only be repugnant to healthy functioning of parliamentary democracy but would also be subversive of the rule of law which is also an essential part of the basic structure of the Constitution*."

The majority judgment pointed out that for the past more than 100 years legislators in Australia and Canada have been liable to be prosecuted for bribery in connection with their legislative activities and with the exception of United Kingdom, most of the Commonwealth countries treat corruption and bribery by Members of the Legislature as a criminal offence. In the United Kingdom also there is a move to change the law in this regard. "There appears no reason why legislators in India should be beyond the pale of laws governing bribery and corruption when all the other public functionaries are subject to such laws."

Prior to 1947 or in the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1947, bribing the legislators or bribe taking by the legislators was not an offence. This was so because the definition of public servant did not include a legislator. It was under the widened definition of "public servant" in The Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988, that a legislator would be a public servant. (For an interesting account of bribery of legislators under the British rule, see the Chapter "Bribing Legislators During the Raj" in A.G. Noorani's Constitutional Questions in India, Oxford University Press, 2000). References to the position in some democratic countries would be in order.

The law in the USA was laid down by the US Supreme Court headed by Chief Justice Earl Warren in 1972. A Senator who had accepted favours as a member of the Senate put up a defense that prosecution would violate Article 1 - Section 6 of the US Constitution which protected Members of the Congress in respect of votes or speeches in the Congress. The US Supreme Court ruled (6:3) that the Constitutional provision did not prevent the indictment and prosecution for taking bribes, which is not a part of any legislative process or function. The relevant clause was not for the personal benefit of a legislator but it was to protect the integrity of the legislative process.

In Australia, Section 73A of the Crimes Act provides that an MP asking for or receiving or offering a benefit in return for the exercise of his duty as an MP is liable to a

sentence of two years' imprisonment. In Canada, for the same offence, sentence of up to 14 years is provided for. In both the countries there are specific provisions on the subject.

In Britain, it is noticed that the Royal Commission on Standards of Conduct in Public Life (1974-76), headed by Lord Salmon opined that neither the statutory law nor the common law covers the bribery of an MP in respect of parliamentary activities: it is a mere breach of privilege. The Salmon Commission was of the view that a legislator does not hold an office. Interestingly, Lord Salmon on another occasion has observed that the Bill of Rights, which is the charter of the rights and privileges of the Members of English Parliament, does not deal with the subject of legislators' misconduct of corruption though the crime of corruption is complete when the bribe is offered or given or solicited or taken.

Recently many cases of English parliamentarians accepting favours have been coming to light. In October 1994, Prime Minister John Major announced the appointment of a Committee: "to examine current concerns about standards of conduct of all holders of public office, including arrangements relating to financial and commercial activities and make recommendations as to any changes in present arrangements, which might be required to ensure the highest standards of propriety in public life. For these purposes, public life includes MPs"

The Committee was headed by Lord Nolan, a law Lord. I should mention here that the impetus for the appointment of this committee was provided by two disclosures made by two newspapers. In July 1994, the *Sunday Times* revealed that the MPs accepted £1000 to ask questions in the Parliament. In October 1994, *The Guardian* came with a disclosure that the rate was doubled in one instance because the giver of the bribe was one of the richest persons in England viz, the owner of Harrods, Mohammed Ali-Fayed, whose son perished with Princess Diana in the car crash in Paris. Lord Nolan Committee in its first report submitted in July 1995, said,

"In the interests of Members as well as the wider public interest, it is important that the extent to which the actions of the Members are subject to the law of bribery should be clarified as soon as possible."

The Government of the day responded by announcing,

"The Government reaffirms its commitment to consolidate the laws on corruption and welcomes the opportunity to clarify the law relating to the bribery of or receipt of a bribe by a Member of Parliament alongside that consolidation."

In English law, the Parliament itself is the High Court which can try an offence, but it would be more expedient and practical to entrust this to regular investigating agencies which have the time, training and experience for the investigation of offences.

In the meantime, the matter is bogged down at the level of discussion of privileges.

Let not our law makers destroy the rule of law. All of us seek the protection of law. It is the rule of law which upheld will protect us.

"*Dharm rakshati rakshitah*"

■

Treasure of Faith

Hoards of Wealth in Padmnabh Temple

Ram Puniyani

It seems that in this profane world, the 'Holy' seem to be most monetarily wealthy. Recently the material goods of the men of God have come to be known more openly than before. Bhagwan Satya Sai of Putthaparthy, not only had over 40000+ crores of wealth; some of this was kept in his personal quarter, in the form of cash and Gold. Not to be left behind the most successful Yoga Guru and the champion of unearthing illicit money stashed abroad, Baba Ramdev, also has hoards of money. It is said he controls over 11000 crores. All this came to prominence once Ramdev began his campaign by undertaking fast at Ramlila maidan. These are just two samples from the Godmen, who are currently ruling the spiritual realm. Other Godmen like Sri Sri Ravishanker, Morari Bapu, Maa Amritanand Mai, Asaram Bapu and other of their tribe are also wealthy to the hilt. Unlike the low caste saints of the genre of Kabir, Tukaram, Narsi Mehta, Dadu or Raidas, most of those in the God market today have made humongous riches.

The other centres' of faith, the temples, also have infinite wealth. It is known that Tirupati Balaji Temple, Sai Baba of Shirdi Shrine, Siddhivinayaka in Mumbai and many such places are troves of treasure. This wealth comes from devotees' offerings. Lately some BJP ruled States, e.g. Karnataka, Governments are also donating money to holy places. Many claim that this wealth is devoted for public welfare. In is reported that only 0.5% of Bhagwan Satya Sai's wealth was used for social welfare. How much of these offering are tax paid or comprise of illicit wealth is anybody's guess. As Godmen are prominently visible currently, more facts about the stinking wealth of these centres of faith are coming to light. Some of these are plain shockers.

One such shocker comes in the form of the news (July 2011) that Shree Padmanabhswamy temple of Tiruvananthpuram's lockers have incalculable wealth. These lockers were opened on the orders of Supreme Court. It seems that the deity of this Holy shrine is the richest 'God on Earth'. The mind boggling wealth of Lakhs of Crores has been locked up there from last few centuries. The source of this wealth is multiple, part of this came from devotees offerings and the major chunk has came from the wealth of King Marthanda Varma, The source of his wealth was taxation of poor farmers, tax income from slave trade, and by appropriating the wealth of other kings. The source of wealth is known but its controls are in the hands of the temple trust. The surfacing of such a vast treasure has raised the issue, to who does this wealth belong?

Marthanda Varma the king who defeated small kings to garner this huge wealth was under the influence of a Brahman priest. In due course King dedicated all his wealth and his sword to Padmnanbha Temple and declared himself as Padmanabh*dasa*, and acted as the custodian of this wealth. The same regime and temple wealth was partly used for opening up feeding houses for Brahmins, but overall the whole wealth has remained intact in the coffers of the temple. The temple is being managed by a Committee with the heir of Martanda Varma as the controller of the treasure.

Does the God, deity, need so much wealth? And can this vast ocean of riches be of any good to the society at large in the material sense. One concedes that the wealth with the deity is `serving various emotive-spiritual' purposes, and many a Hindu groups and even the Congress politicians have claimed that the wealth should remain as it is where it is and a small part of it can be diverted for social welfare.

With Independence and later with abolition of privy purses to the Kings, who were enjoying privileges by claiming to have divine right to rule, the rule passed on to the state, the elected representative of the people. So should mere legality decide the use of this wealth or should the needs of society at large decide the utilization of such wealth. What will make God most happy; the hoarding of this wealth under the control of few or use of this wealth for the larger good of society?

As such when we are hearing that a lot of wealth kept by Indians in banks aboard should be declared national asset and used for the welfare of the people, should we also pay our attention to this 'Temple-Baba' wealth as well? Those shouting hoarse, and correctly so, about nationalizing illicit money are keeping quiet on the issue of wealth with God, and wealth with Godmen, both. It is a bit of a riddle that those who have been fasting and agitating on the issue of illicit wealth seal their lips when this social wealth under the control of Deity or a small group of trustees is concerned.

As such there are interesting historical incidents about Holy places and wealth. Earlier also these places of worship were the places with good amount of wealth and many a Kings, motivated by the lust plundered it. Mahmud Gazni had the clear motive of grabbing Somnath temple wealth, but he claimed that he does not believe in idol worship, so he is destroying the temple. Such historiography became the stuff on which communal divides were drawn and divisive politics sustains itself. Here one forgets that even Hindu Kings have plundered the wealth in temples. Kalhan's Rajtangini mentions that 11thCentury ruler of Kashmir, Raja Harshdev, had created a new designation of an officer, *Decottpatan Nayak*, whose job was to uproot the precious idols of Gods in the Holy places. The matters of faith are very delicate and have become more so during last three decades as the temple issues have bypassed the issues of poverty and dignity of weaker section of society.

One should also make it clear that similar wealth is locked up in other religious institutions, like in Churches and with Wakf board, though the source of this may be different. All this needs to be brought to the service of the community at large.

In current times while there is a need to respect the faith of people, there is also a need to think of social welfare in all possible manners. Such treasures have to be brought under social control and every penny of this must go for programs aimed at alleviation of poverty or empowerment of the weak and poor.

■

Seeing God in tsunamis and everyday events

Jesse Bering

It's only a matter of time—in fact, they've already started cropping up—before reality-challenged individuals begin pontificating about what God could have possibly been so hot-and-bothered about to trigger last week's devastating earthquake and tsunami in Japan. (Surely, if we were to ask Westboro Baptist Church members, it must have something to do with the gays.) But from a psychological perspective, what type of mind does it take to see unexpected natural events such as the horrifying scenes still unfolding in Japan as "signs" or "omens" related to human behaviors?

In the summer of 2005, my University of Arkansas colleague Becky Parker and I began the first experimental study to investigate the psychology underlying this strange phenomenon. In this experiment, published the following year in *Developmental Psychology*, we invited a group of three- to nine-year-old children into our lab and told them they were about to play a fun guessing game. It was a simple game in which each child was tested

individually. The child was asked to go to the corner of the room and to cover his or her eyes before coming back and guessing which of two large boxes contained a hidden ball. All the child had to do was place a hand on the box that he or she believed contained the ball. A short time was allowed for the decision to be made but, importantly, during that time the children were allowed to change their mind at any time by moving their hand to the other box. The final answer on each of the four trials was reflected simply by where the child's hand was when the experimenter said, "Time's up!" Children who guessed right won a sticker prize.

In reality, the game was a little more complicated than this. There were secretly two balls, one in each box, and we had decided in advance whether the children were going to get it "right" or "wrong" on each of the four guessing trials. At the conclusion of each trial, the child was shown the contents of only one of the boxes. The other box remained closed. For example, for "wrong" guesses, only the unselected box was opened, and the child was told to look inside ("Aw, too bad. The ball was in the other box this time. See?"). Children who had been randomly assigned to the control condition were told that they had been successful on a random two of the four trials. Children assigned to the experimental condition received some additional information before starting the game. These children were told that there was a friendly magic princess in the room, "Princess Alice," who had made herself invisible. We showed them a picture of Princess Alice hanging against the door inside the room (one that looked remarkably like Barbie), and we gave them the following information: "Princess Alice really likes you, and she's going to help you play this game. She's going to tell you, somehow, when you pick the *wrong* box." We repeated this information right before each of the four trials, in case the children had forgotten.

For every child in the study, whether assigned to the standard control condition ("No Princess Alice") or to the experimental condition ("Princess Alice"), we engineered the room such that a spontaneous and unexpected event would occur just as the child placed a hand on one of the boxes. For example, in one case, the picture of Princess Alice came crashing to the floor as soon as the child made a decision, and in another case a table lamp flickered on and off. (We didn't have to consult with Industrial Light & Magic to rig these surprise events; we just arranged for an undergraduate student to lift a magnet on the other side of the door to make the picture fall, and we hid a remote control for the table lamp surreptitiously in the experimenter's pocket.) The predictions were clear: if the children in the experimental condition interpreted the picture falling and the light flashing as a sign from Princess Alice that they had chosen the wrong box, they would move their hand to the other box.

What we found was rather surprising, even to us. Only the oldest children, the seven- to nine-year-olds, from the experimental (Princess Alice) condition, moved their hands to the

other box in response to the unexpected events. By contrast, their same-aged peers from the control condition failed to move their hands. This finding told us that the explicit concept of a specific supernatural agent—likely acquired from and reinforced by cultural sources—is needed for people to see communicative messages in natural events. In other words, children, at least, don't automatically infer meaning in natural events without first being primed somehow with the idea of an identifiable supernatural agent such as Princess Alice (or God, one's dead mother, angels, etc.).

More curious, though, was the fact that the slightly younger children in the study, even those who had been told about Princess Alice, apparently failed to see any communicative message in the light-flashing or picture-falling events. These children kept their hands just where they were. When we asked them later why these things happened, these five- and six-year-olds said that Princess Alice had caused them, but they saw her as simply an eccentric, invisible woman running around the room knocking pictures off the wall and causing the lights to flicker. To them, Princess Alice was like a mischievous poltergeist with attention deficit disorder: she did things because she wanted to, and that's that. One of these children answered that Princess Alice had knocked the picture off the wall because she thought it looked better on the ground. In other words, they completely failed to see her "behavior" as having any meaningful connection with the decision they had just made on the guessing game; they saw no "signs" there.

The youngest children in the study, the three- and four-year-olds in both conditions, only shrugged their shoulders or gave physical explanations for the events, such as the picture not being sticky enough to stay on the wall or the light being broken. Ironically, these youngest children were actually the most scientific of the bunch, perhaps because they interpreted "invisible" to mean simply "not present in the room" rather than "transparent." Contrary to the common assumption that superstitious beliefs represent a childish mode of sloppy and undeveloped thinking, therefore, the ability to be superstitious actually demands some mental sophistication. At the very least, it's an acquired cognitive skill.

Still, the real puzzle to our findings was to be found in the reactions of the five- and six-year-olds from the Princess Alice condition. Clearly they possessed the same understanding of invisibility as did the older children, because they also believed Princess Alice caused these spooky things to happen in the lab. Yet although we reminded these children repeatedly that Princess Alice would tell them, somehow, if they chose the wrong box, they failed to put two and two together. So what is the critical change between the ages of about six and seven that allows older children to perceive natural events as being communicative messages *about* their own behaviors (in this case, their choice of box) rather

than simply the capricious, arbitrary actions of some invisible or otherwise supernatural entity?

The answer probably lies in the maturation of children's theory-of-mind abilities in this critical period of brain development. Research by University of Salzburg psychologist Josef Perner, for instance, has revealed that it's not until about the age of seven that children are first able to reason about "multiple orders" of mental states. This is the type of everyday, grown-up social cognition whereby theory of mind becomes effortlessly layered in complex, soap opera–style interactions with other people. Not only do we reason about what's going on inside someone else's head, but we also reason about what other people are reasoning is happening inside still other people's heads! For example, in the everyday (nonsupernatural) social domain, one would need this kind of mature theory of mind to reason in the following manner:

"Jakob thinks that Adrienne doesn't know I stole the jewels."

Whereas a basic ("first-order") theory of mind allows even a young preschooler to understand the first propositional clause in this statement, "Jakob thinks that . . . ," it takes a somewhat more mature ("second-order") theory of mind to fully comprehend the entire social scenario: "Jakob thinks that [Adrienne doesn't know] . . ."

Most people can't go much beyond four orders of mental-state reasoning (consider the Machiavellian complexities of, say, Leo Tolstoy's novels), but studies show that the absolute maximum in adults hovers around seven orders of mental state. The important thing to note is that, owing to their still-developing theory-of-mind skills, children younger than seven years of age have great difficulty reasoning about multiple orders of mental states. Knowing this then helps us understand the surprising results from the Princess Alice experiment. To pass the test (move their hand) in response to the picture falling or the light flashing, the children essentially had to be reasoning in the following manner:

"Princess Alice knows that [I don't know] where the ball is hidden."

To interpret the events as communicative messages, as being about their choice on the guessing game, demands a sort of third-person perspective of the self's actions: "What must this other entity, who is watching my behavior, think is happening inside my head?" The Princess Alice findings are important because they tell us that, before the age of seven, children's minds aren't quite cognitively ripe enough to allow them to be superstitious thinkers. The inner lives of slightly older children, by contrast, are drenched in symbolic meaning. One second-grader was even convinced that the bell in the nearby university clock tower was Princess Alice "talking" to him.

Princess Alice may not have the *je ne sais quoi* of Mother Mary or the fiery charisma of the Abrahamic God we're all familiar with, but she's arguably a sort of empirically constructed god-by-proxy in her own right. The point is, the same basic cognitive processes—namely, a mature theory of mind—are also involved in the believer's sense of receiving divine guidance from these other members of the more popular holy family. When people ask God to give them a sign, they're often at a standstill, a fork in the road, paralyzed in a critical moment of existential ambivalence. In such cases, our ears are pricked, our eyes widened, our thoughts ruminating on a particular problem—often "only God knows" what's on our minds and the extent to which we're struggling to make a decision. It's not questions like whether we should choose a different box, but rather decisions such as these: Should I stay with this person or leave him? Should I risk everything, start all over in a new city, or stay here where I'm stifled and bored? Should I have another baby? Should I continue receiving harsh treatment for my disease, or should I just pack it in and call it a life? Just like the location of the hidden ball inside one of those two boxes, we're convinced that there's a right and a wrong answer to such important life questions. And for most of us, it's God, not Princess Alice, who holds the privileged answers.

God doesn't tell us the answers directly, of course. There's no nod to the left, no telling elbow poke in our side or "psst" in our ear. Rather, many envision God, and other entities like Him, as encrypting strategic information in an almost infinite array of natural events: the prognostic stopping of a clock at a certain hour and time; the sudden shrieking of a hawk; an embarrassing blemish on our nose appearing on the eve of an important interview; a choice parking spot opening up at a crowded mall just as we pull around; an interesting stranger sitting next to us on a plane. The possibilities are endless. When the emotional climate is just right, there's hardly a shape or form that "evidence" cannot assume. Our minds make meaning by disambiguating the meaningless.

This sign-reading tendency has a distinct and clear relationship with morality. When it comes to unexpected heartache and tragedy, our appetite for unraveling the meaning of these ambiguous "messages" can become ravenous. Misfortunes appear cryptic, symbolic; they seem clearly to be *about* our behaviors. Our minds restlessly gather up bits of the past as if they were important clues to what just happened. And no stone goes unturned. Nothing is too mundane or trivial; anything to settle our peripatetic thoughts from arriving at the unthinkable truth that there is no answer because there is no riddle, that life is life and that is that.

■

Wide-Ranging Questions about India

Prabhakar Nanawaty

"The whole value of Marxism seems to me to be in the absence of dogmatism, mode of approach, and in the attitude to action… The success or failures of the Russian social experiments do not directly affect the validity of the Marxian theory."

-Jawaharlal Nehru, *Autobiography*

In fact these words were written long before the fall of communist regime in USSR and Jawaharlal Nehru gave a fitting reply to critics of Marxism. However while reading *Exasperating Essays: Exercises in the Dialectical Method* written by DD Kosambi, a scholar, historian and a mathematician, one will understand what misconceptions the elite Indian society had about various aspects of social life in general and Marxism in particular. In fact D.D. Kosambi took mammoth task to air his views on aspects like Is leadership necessary? Need the individual do nothing because all mass changes are inevitable? Is India really headed towards socialism? Is there a powerful class in India that has ideas contrary to those of our leaders and planning commission? Are the Chinese on the way to socialism? What is meant by freedom of science and of the scientist? Is the 'inner voice' always a safe guide? Why did Buddhism, the most benign of religions fade away from its own country? What is the significance of the 1857 revolt? Is Sanskrit literature free from class bias? Can the factors that impede World Peace be subjugated?

Professor D.D. Kosambi was one of the best known scientists of our country endowed with a truly renaissance versatility. Shunning the lime-light of publicity, he made outstanding contribution in various fields of knowledge, which included mathematics, statistics, Numismatics, indology, history as well as contemporary socio – political problems. The book under review is a collection of wide ranging essays written during the years 1939 to 1957. As stated in the introduction written by D.D. Kosambi himself, these essays (and a short story "The Kanpur Road") still continue to attract studious readers. This introduction tries to clarify the philosophical objections raised by Indian official Marxists (OM). In this connection Dr Savyasachi Bhattacharya, Chairman of the Indian Council of Historical Research and a former Professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University, states that “Indian Official Marxists hereafter called OM” were often displeased with him but he could not but protest their “theological emphasis on the inviolable sanctity of the current party line, or irrelevant quotations from the classics.” In using Marxist method in his own lights, in his effort to

construe the civilization in India, in the convergences and divergences between his approach and the nationalist discourse of civilization, D.D. Kosambi has left much for us to try and understand and evaluate. There is a feeling that Marxism has become obsolete in 19th century itself. But D.D. Kosambi compares Marxism with scientific achievements of that era and states that the achievements and Marxism will never become obsolete in any sense.

Author refers to the analogy of crystallization to explain the position of leadership in a social movement. He feels that the entire process of transformation with very little scope for super-saturation should be a natural process and its aftermath. He makes this statement while explaining why the communist revolution was successful in Russia but failed in Germany. He attributes this to leadership of Lenin, though he may not have lead the whole movement alone, but he was a great link in the chain. In religious leadership though one cannot predict about theological understanding of masses, the leadership knows how to stand firm during social unrest. In fact author quotes the example of Mahatma Gandhi. In 1930, when *Satyagrah* got out of hand, he discovered the need for the uplift of Dalits and whole movement was sidetracked.

While reviewing the book *Discovery of India* written by Jawaharlal Nehru while he was in prison, the author appreciates the efforts taken by Nehru to put Indian History in broader perspective. However he feels that the book could not be recommended to the general reader, though Prof Kosambi admires the work of Nehru. Prof Kosambi is perplexed on the statements made on racism and casteism prevailing in India. Author analyses the mindset of bourgeoisie settled in South Africa which typically wants equality with the Whites but not with Negroes. Though the equations might have changed in due course of time; however one can trace the remnants of bourgeoisie mentality in day-to-day affairs even now. In fact Prof Kosambi in a prophetic manner predicts that though history had thrust upon Nehru mantle of leadership, the strong and powerfully organized middle class will cleverly exploit him for its own purpose and Nehru's orientation towards Marxism will be bound to change.

In the essay on 'The Class Structure of India' author quotes extensively Marx who predicted that the British bourgeoisie will never allow the Indians to reap the fruits of the progress. Author traces the events leading to decline of feudalism in India and how the technological progress metamorphosised the society. In fact hunger, unemployment, epidemic diseases have become permanent and massive features of Indian society in spite of elimination of older property forms and replacing them with vast class of landless farm laborers with no hope of massive industrialization. In reality, with active support of great Indian middle class the Government itself became the biggest capitalist, the main banker, the

greatest employer and ultimate refuge of intelligentsia.

According to author, the greed and avarice of pro-capitalists appears to be one of the reasons for this state of affairs and poor conditions. He finds that civilized moneymakers of advanced capitalist countries are satisfied with 5 % profit margin on their turnover; contrary to this the Indian capitalists' profit range is anywhere between 20 % to 50 %. Indian bourgeoisie had appeared last on the capitalist stage whereas other capitalists have almost abandoned the exploitation and adopted welfare means to satisfy the working class. As such author suggests that India will be in a position if it adopts socialism. However he was afraid of socialism turning into fascism by empowering a leader to dictate the terms.

It is quite surprising to know that author, in 1957 itself, predicted that China will be far ahead of any other countries due to its policies and implementation methodologies. According to him the China made progress due to its correct social approach. In fact author compares India with China and points out at the differences in the mindsets of the population at large. For example, birth control propaganda catches on very quickly in China since Chinese know that in their old age they will be comfortable and looked after by the State even when they are childless. Same is not true in India.

In the essay on 'Science and Freedom' author criticizes heavily the scientists who think freedom means to do whatever they like while being paid by Universities, business houses or governments. In fact author reminds them that science is no longer 'independent' as it was in its infant stage. Scientists are no more harmless who are toying with toxic chemicals, nuclear materials and complex gadgetries. They are, in fact, part of the society and they don't need any special treatment for their services. There is a well defined social structure and there is a social necessity for scientists too. Author emphasizes that science is not mere accumulation of experimental data; the data should settle some disputed theory and should have some relation with production. Prof Kosambi feels that the science need not be the creation of gifted individuals. In fact, gifted individuals are there in every age and in every field right from the inception of society. There is nothing great about these individuals since they are the product of the environment in which they are growing.

Like any other thinker and scholar Prof Kosambi too had the curiosity to solve the mystery behind the death of Socrates. He discusses this issue from democratic angle and makes certain severe comments on the social circumstances of that time under which he was forced to drink the poison.

In the chapter 'The Decline of Buddhism in India' author pinpoints the reasons for the fall of Buddhism in India. According to him, though the Buddhism owed its initial success since it fulfilled social need of that era, it started deviating from the principles it had set.

During the course of time, Buddhism became uneconomic beyond the reach of common man; monasteries became rich, the inmates were pampered, and monks started behaving like Vedic Brahmins. Buddha became 'Chakravarti'. The real damage came from within the practitioners and in fact there was a class distinction among Buddhist scholars which ultimately lead the religion to decline in India.

The author had devoted a full chapter on the great Sanskrit poet, Bhartrihari, quoting the verses in original and their relevance as a great poet of ancient era. As a true democrat, author once again takes the issue in the essay 'Imperialism and Peace'. According to him, peace and democracy are two sides of the same coin and one cannot sustain without the other. No one should claim to be another's master whether by divine right, the right of birth, the right of armed conquest, or the right as a rich. Such rights are acquired by fraudulent means and violence against the vast majority of the people and by destroying truth and justice. The imperialism thrives on the profits and this profit benefits a few monopolists.

While concluding again we may quote Dr. Sabyasachi Bhattacharya in verbatim "In posing such wide-ranging questions about the civilization in India, Kosambi differed from the general run of academic historians of his times for they rarely engaged in the discourse of civilizations. He was swimming against the current. The specialised and fragmented view in the academic historians' professional writings did not usually add up to that vision of totality that the notion of civilization demands. The fact that Kosambi was never given his due by them in his lifetime can be, arguably, ascribed to their disdain for a non-professional who was not only an avowed Marxist, but also given to talking about a dubious entity called 'civilization.'"

Exasperating Essays: Exercises in the Dialectical Method
D. D. Kosambi
Published by Sri R.P. Nene, Pune 411030 (1986)
Price Rs 15, pp 99

■

Why do the ANS Oppose Only Hindu Religion

Dr. Narendra Dabholkar

This question is asked deliberately with the intension of discouraging the ANS activists and spawning prejudice in the minds of people. Not only in Maharashtra but even elsewhere in India all Rationalist movements are confronted with the same question with respect to their part in eradicating superstitions. ANS activities do involve critical appraisal of

religious practices directly or indirectly. But those who scrupulously follow age old religious practices, firmly believe that what they practice is the true religion and insist that everyone should follow what they think is true religion. Such people feel threatened by the ANS activity of engendering a critical attitude in the minds of people. When the social psyche becomes critical, people start criticizing religious practices and religion itself. To avoid this the orthodox religionists want to wean away the populace from ANS. That is why they deliberately drum up allegations against the ANS that they oppose only the Hindu religion. What is the truth of the matter? It is as follows:

Superstition is 'Black marketing' in the field of faiths. So what religion this black marketer follows should be nobody's concern; least of all of the ANS. The Samiti has always opposed exploitative Buvabaji and religious rituals that boost superstition where ever and whenever they occur. ANS has various methods of its own for dealing with this exploitative trade. Samiti has fought against many Muslim Baba/Buvas and the details of their fight against them over the last 20 years can be found in the relevant magazines published by the ANS. The Samiti has fought against the Christian Priests who claim that due to their prayers blind people can see again, dumb can start speaking and lame walk like normal men. Samiti has opposed the expensive but meaningless rituals of the Jains; and the ritual of dashing heads against the wall of a village temple, in the Phalatan Taluka, practiced by those who call themselves Bauddhas. Again all those who accuse the ANS of being anti-Hindu can peruse and verify the details of all these battles in the ANS' magazines.

It is true that majority of the struggles against superstitions involve the Hindus. But that can't be helped since Hindus constitute 82% of the population of India. Consequently 82% of the struggles that Samiti has fought are against Hindu Superstitions; a large majority indeed!

People are provoked if their superstitions are criticized by others belonging to a religion other than their own. Even criticism of superstition of one caste by another caste causes hatred and ill feeling. Criticism of the thread ceremony of the Brahmins, the banning of widow remarriage prevalent amongst the Marathas, the animal sacrifice by the Dhangar community during fairs, etc. by any caste than the one that observes the superstitious custom leads to not only discontent but even to unrest. Since 82% of the population is Hindu, at least that many ANS activists must be Hindus. Naturally when Hindu activists talk about Muslim superstitions, the Muslims hate it.

The caste structure is exclusively a Hindu socio-religious system. There are roughly 6 to 6 ½ thousand castes among the Hindus. In fact the caste seems to be more important than the religion. Each caste has its own rituals and rites, its own customs and practices and its

own traditions and mores. They might have been useful and necessary sometime in the past. But right now most of these rituals, customs and traditions are useless and nothing more than superstitions. The Hindu religion, being much older than other religions, does not have one 'Book' of religion and has a plethora of gods and goddesses. In comparison, Christianity is just 2000 years old and has a single 'Book' of religion. The Father in the heaven and His Son too are not more than one. Islam is still younger, just 1400 years old and has only one Allah and one Prophet and the Muslims revere only one 'Book' of religion. The plethora of Gods and Goddesses, umpteen books of religion and innumerable customs and traditions of the Hindus make a fertile ground for generating superstitions.

An important fact to be considered here is that in the course of the evolution of Hindu Religion there emerged plenty of eminent social reformers who dared criticize superstitions mercilessly. The Charvak and the Lokayat tradition that existed 3 ½ thousand years ago is a conspicuous example of this fact. One can compile a long list of recent Hindu social reformers like Mahatma Phule, Shahu Maharaj, lokahitavadi, Agarkar, Dr. Ambedkar, Savarkar, Prabodhankar Thakare, Gadgebaba and so on and on and that too just from Maharashtra. These great men, in fact cautioned all humanity, not just one religion, to be humane and vigilant but their teaching inadvertently could address only the Hindus. Here, mention of the ruthless examination of religious books undertaken by Savarkar, the Hero of Independence and more important from our view point, eulogized as the ruler of Hindu hearts, is a must. The exposition of the thorough pitiless scrutiny of religious books that he made, illustrates the long tradition of Hindu social reformers who endeavored to eradicate superstitions. The progressive Hindu Reformative sects like the Prarthana Samaj, maintained that there is only one God and one needs no ritual and sanction of the religious Books to pray Him.

Here is what Savarkar has said about religious books of all religions, 'the man who does not want to become just a telephone of religion and wants to possess a mind and intellect of his own, should overcome his belief in the "word" and nurture the opinion that despite being respectable 'Books' and matter for thorough study, the Vedas, the Avesta, the Bible and the Koran are but just manmade tomes and should be studied accordingly. Four centuries ago, Europe was similarly enslaved by the unalterable supremacy of religion; but since the time Europe distanced itself from the Bible and adhered to science, it was freed from the shackles of Shruti-Smriti-Puranokta (codes of behaviour, morality, worship etc. etc. stipulated in the religious tomes of supernatural origin) and became modern and up-to-date; it is now 4000 years ahead of us. It conquered three continents! If the Indian Nation aims to be like Europe, it should close the 'Book' of the ancient age, forget the supremacy of Shruti,

Smriti and Puran, keep them safely away in libraries and then enter into the age of Science. Those old tomes have the only authority of telling us what happened yesterday. But the science that is objective and experimental, alone is authorized to decide what is appropriate for today. Modernity contains the essence of all that was useful in the past experiences; but the 'Shruti-Smriti-Puranokt' cannot have even a speck of modern knowledge. Therefore we ought to be modern and up-to-date. Whether a thing is good or bad, a reform is beneficial or not should be answered, here after, only on one test, i.e. whether it is useful or useless today. Never should the question whether some thing has sanction in the scriptures be ever asked henceforth.'

There are religious powers in Maharashtra and in India, which indulge in selfish politics. They consider themselves to be the contractors dealing in what is good of the Hindus. According to them it is their privilege to decide which reforms in the Hindu religion are necessary and which are not necessary. The ANS being a progressive organization, its activists do not label themselves with the religion and the caste they come from. They do not talk about religion and are in a sense indifferent to it. Some Hindu Organizations, self styled protectors of Hindu religion take advantage of the indifference shown towards religion by progressive organizations and issue edicts as to which religious issues should be talked about and which are prohibited. They intimidate people into following their edicts. It is a way of declaring their monopoly as the protectors of religion. ANS need not and does not recognize their monopoly, because the ANS feels that such parochial self proclaimed protectors and authoritarians had never been the spokesmen of the Hindu religion which is liberal, tolerant and ethical. They are not and will never be the spokesmen of all Hindus. Secondly most of the activists of ANS are born to Hindu parents and are Hindus in the sense that they have not converted to any other religion. So they do have the right to talk about the superstitions in Hindu religion. There is no reason why they should surrender this right to the Hinduists.

Let us for a moment assume that the ANS works for (eradication of superstitions only amongst) the Hindus. But the important issue here is-- whether the work undertaken by ANS is good; whether it is desirable and whether it is beneficial to the society. The ANS is confident that their work is appropriate, desirable and essential. What is more interesting is that the Hinduists themselves agree that this work ought to be done. And yet they ask why eradicate only Hindu superstitions? The confusion in their mind is clearly seen when they ask this question. Superstition is like the lumber and litter in the house. Let us assume for a moment that our nation is a ten rooms house. So the religion with 82% population will have 8 rooms. Islam with 12 to 13 % population will get one room. The remaining one room will go non-Hindu, non-Muslim population. Now, if the ANS, at its own cost, undertakes cleaning 8

out of these ten rooms of the house, the major part of the house will, obviously, be free of garbage. Under such circumstances if one takes the stand that unless the '9th' room is cleaned we will not allow anyone to touch the first 8 rooms, it means that this individual is either insane or he does not want that people of the first 8 rooms are freed of the garbage and can Bring in a change for the better. Eradication of superstitions is undoubtedly in the interest of the Hindus; and to oppose it is being hostile to people. Those who oppose ANS, harbor a ridiculously wrong notion that the Hindus after getting rid of all their superstitions will have no guts; while the superstitious Muslims will remain hardened fanatics. The Hindu-Muslim conflict being inescapable in this country the hardened fanatic Muslims will easily defeat the gutless Hindus whenever skirmishes take place. One only needs to pity those who proffer such flimsy, deceptive arguments.

■

'Antaratma' Bhai— Ye kya Bimari Hai ?

Hello, Barkha Madame, Did you listen today, an interesting statement by Swamy Agnivesh,, in your Channel, ? He said that he tried his best to persuade Anna Saheb, to stop the fasting, but he was adamant and he said " My Antaratma [Inner voice] urges him not to yeild" To this The Swamy remarked "What is this 'Antaratma' Bhai--ye kya Bimari hai ? {What is this sickness]. We had read before that president. Bush too had said ' God is on his side '. He was also guided by his Antaratma to attack Iraq to eliminate just one man-Sadddam'. A few decades back one Raman Raghav killed poor pavement sleepers in Bombay , with heavy stones in the night. He too said in the Court that his God told him to do so.

First it was the Zionist lobby that manipulated Bush's Antaratma. This was exposed in many articles that appeared in Khaleej Times by renowned journalists like Alan Sabrosky, Alan Hart and Jeff Gates. Second, a mentally deranged man's inner voice was prompted by God himself. Don't you believe that Anna Saheb's 'Antaratma' was manipulated by the saffron forces? Is Anna aware of this? May not be, being a very simple man of impeccable character.

We have seen through out the history that these Saffron-Forces were so crafty, one would not know their diabolical plans. In India the "Priest Craft' has become highly sophisticated. Many decades back Historian Arnold Toynbee wrote in his book 'World History' that epicenter of all intrigues could be found in the Church. It is hoped that you journalists would ponder over this, instead of staging aggressive--dramas in your channels to please your bosses-- the Media barons.

G.K.Shet Revankar.